

**An Orgasm and an Atom:  
Performing Passion and Freedom in  
Margaret Sweatman's *When Alice Lay Down With Peter***

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## Abstract

Margaret Sweatman's novel, *When Alice Lay Down With Peter*, plays with the British Empire's adventure story and its creation of manhood. Mimicking this creative process in the Canadian Northwest, Sweatman conceives and births a woman's previously erased passion back into the adventure story in a playful, erotic, and politically-charged presentation of the performing female body. Although appreciating the "magic realism element to the novel" (157), Nicole Markotic suggests that Sweatman's "characters, like the readers, become 'History Tourists'" and "are mere backdrop for the last century or so of 'Current Events' that take precedence over their stories" (156). The McCormack women, Markotic argues, "have few stories other than going to war, having one momentous sex scene, giving birth" (156). Indeed, Sweatman's whirlwind tour through 109 years of well-documented, and already too many times rehashed, rebellions, labour strikes, and world wars, seems to reflect this sentiment, but to limit Sweatman and her characters to only the Empire's gender performative is to miss the female body performing as its own Big Bang.

Since a woman's contingency and agency within the Empire's gender performative has been vigorously debated by post modern and cultural theorists, Sweatman chooses to birth her characters into a world of/as performance. Richard Schechner, a pioneer in the field of performance theory, argues in his earlier work, *Essays on Performance Theory* (1977), that performance is a "very inclusive notion of action," in which the performance workshop and the performance strategy of play are much more important than previously imagined (1,61). Sweatman draws on this discovery in order to free her characters to explore passion beyond Imperial and textual constraints. Four generations of McCormack women mimic, mock, and sidewind their way into, around, and beyond the Empire's warring narrative and its heterosexual imperative. They are savvy, sexy, and provocative, playing simultaneously as shameless voyeurs, plagiarists, and war artists.

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## Abbreviations

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* (BTM)

---. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* (GT).

---. "How Can I Deny That These Hands and This Body Are Mine?" (How Can I Deny)

---. *Undoing Gender.* (UG)

Schechner, Richard. *Essays on Performance Theory 1970-1976.* (EPT)

---. *Performance Theory.* (PT)

---. "What is Performance Studies Anyway?" (WIPSA)

Introduction: What comes *before*?

*“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.”*

*And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox . . . ”*

*Isaiah 11:6-7, 9*

*“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth.”*

*John 1:14*

Margaret Sweatman’s novel *When Alice Lay down with Peter* plays with the Canadian Northwest adventure story and its creation of manhood, using that story as a starting point in her fictional attempt to move female consciousness toward spiritual fulfillment and freedom. Writers of Northwest adventure stories, dating from Robert M. Ballantyne (1825-1894) to the modern day writers, for example Robert Kroetsch,<sup>1</sup> have explored the connection between British Imperialism and the adventurer’s expression of his masculinity in the Canadian northwest. Robert M. Ballantyne identified this space of experimentation as a “space of boyish pleasure, an adventure playground,” within which “identities [were] dissolved and constructed” (Phillips 52, 53). Critics, for example R.S Phillips in “Space for Boyish Men and Manly Boys: The Canadian Northwest in Robert Ballantyne’s Adventure Stories,” argue that the adventure story imagined (this idea of) British manhood into being, and played out this new identity on the frontiers of the Canadian Northwest (54).<sup>2</sup> Phillips contends that while the male adventurer thinks he has the freedom to create his own life, his adventurous spirit is being funneled back into obedience to the Empire. He is being groomed as an empire builder (60).

By the same token, women were imagined out of this adventure, or, if they played a role as a wife, mother, or writer, it was “minimal and passive” (Phillips 57).

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<sup>1</sup> Sweatman acknowledges Kroetsch as a brilliant writer in her article, “The future of Prairie Lit” (2003). She says Kroetsch is one of many writers who “took the classical tradition—a geographical and historical impossibility . . . and made the tradition new, postcolonial, indigenous, and in some instances, post-modern” (“The future of Prairie Lit” D13).

<sup>2</sup> This idea of masculinity has been debated in, for example *Culture and Imperialism* by Edward W. Said and “The Imaginative Geography of Masculine Adventure” by Graham Dawson.

Notably, a few women did stretch their prescribed roles to pursue their passion within the Northwest adventure story. For instance, the Métis women acted as guides for the first voyageurs coming west from eastern Canada,<sup>3</sup> and later political activist Nellie McClung led Manitoba's "Political Equality League" (246). Sweatman salutes McClung and her "brilliant group of suffragists," who are best remembered for their "staged mock Parliament at the Walker Theatre" (247). They donned "black cloaks . . . over their evening gowns," and "McClung played the conservative premier, Rodmond Roblin, a chivalric ass, and of course she stole the show" (247). Even Alice, the McCormack family matriarch, has to admit, a bit jealously, that McClung is "'pretty funny'" and "'She even does voices'" (248). But for the most part, women practiced their passion in secrecy or lost it to domesticity. It was not until the later half of the twentieth century that women and women writers began questioning their identities within the Northwest adventure story.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps inspired by the essence of the Métis women and McClung's spirit, Sweatman challenges the authenticity of the masculine adventure story. Usurping the Empire's adventure story as the backdrop to her story, Sweatman frees the McCormack women to explore and mentor their bodies as sites of passion and freedom, not as empire builders, but as empires unfolding.<sup>5</sup>

The adventure story, according to Phillips, is a space of both boyish pleasure and Imperial responsibilities. The young adventurer leaves his "'civilized home,'" the Empire, in order "to playfully transgress social conventions and rules" in the Canadian Northwest (53). He enters this "lighthearted" imaginative space expecting "action, excitement, and fun" (49). However, even on the fringes of the Empire's map, the adventurer's experience is "also meant to be instructive," and his mentorship by the "older voyageurs" subtly funnels his new-found freedom back into conformity and obedience to the Empire (49, 58). The adventure playground, then, is a space that

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<sup>3</sup> Often these relationships led to marriage and children, but when the voyageurs went back to eastern Canada to their white wives, the Métis women were left behind to fend for themselves and raise their children. Thus, Sweatman makes the argument that Marie, a Métis, is the original owner of the McCormack land if there is such a thing as an original owner. For an in depth study of women in fur trade society see *Many Tender Ties: Women in fur-trade society, 1670-1870* by Sylvia Van Kirk.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of novels: *Stone Angel* by Margaret Laurence, *No Fixed Address An Amorous Journey* by Aritha van Herk, and *Perfection of the Morning* by Sharon Butala.

<sup>5</sup> The body as a site of origin and agency has been vigorously debated by post modern and feminist critics, for instance Susan Bordo, Susan Gubar, Linda Hutcheon, Susan Leigh Foster, Margrit Shildric, and Erin Striff.



nurtures the adventurer's rite "of passage from white, middle-class, British boyhood to white, middle-class, British manhood" (Phillips 51), but within this transformation, he is groomed to dominate, civilize, map, and propagate new land for the Empire. The Empire's discursive authority depends on the reiteration of this regulatory process by its adventurer within its adventure playground.

In *When Alice Lay Down With Peter*, Sweatman exposes this fraudulent discursive methodology of British Imperialism, or the Empire, in which it usurps biblical words to authorize its warring narrative. The Empire extrapolates a recognizable theological citation from Isaiah that suggests both a peaceful co-existence and a naïve generosity, and disguises its warring narrative under that pretense. However, peace, for the British Empire, is a time of rebuilding its army and enjoying the spoils of war, and peaceful co-existence is attainable only if the lamb, kid, and calf of Isaiah recognize the Empire as the wolf, leopard, and lion, and become its soldier. It is a time of generosity, the "cow and bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together," only if the uncivilized uphold the heterosexual imperative of the Empire and reproduce soldier-babies: "'That's what build empires! That's what makes us welcome in these uncivilized places! Seed! They're crying for it'" (161). Since the reiteration of the British Empire's regulatory network, its warring narrative, depends on its soldier and its heterosexual imperative, it creates and reinforces social, cultural, and political norms that naturalize this idea of British manhood. Thus, the Empire's adventure story is not an adventurer's story at all, but the Empire's story of perpetuating its regulatory process as a truth in the bedroom, on the battlefield, and in the canon. It is this creative process that becomes the discourse of young men's dreams, and it is read, taught, mentored, and published as such.

Challenged by history's attempt at deliberate erasure of both a woman's experience and its documentation, and recognizing that the traditional male adventure story had already tied the imagination to the landscape, Sweatman mimics this creative process to birth an adventure story of her heroine, Blondie, on the banks of the Red River, near St. Norbert, Manitoba, but with a difference. Defying the familiar and traditional adventure story, and yet utilizing the novel's linearity of time and space, Sweatman transforms the Empire's textual world, its adventure playground, into her world of performance. Within this world, Sweatman's characters, the McCormack

women, pursue passion and freedom under the lady-like banner of “love” (9). Writing and performing, Sweatman and her characters wind their way through the adventure playground, stealing, exaggerating, and critiquing historically specific events, while at the same time featuring the sexy body, playing and making meaning at once within the adventure playground and in the ellipses between the realm of the living and the dead.

Revisiting and re-telling politically charged historical events through the eyes of her characters, Sweatman positions Alice, Blondie’s mother, and her husband Peter in a “New World” that is “certainly wild” (13), Rupert’s Land, a country where supposedly “nobody can own you” (8). However, as Alice and Peter are getting acquainted with this new land, which is “truly paradise,” working hard for “a man’s wage,” having fun entertaining everyone in the camps, and gaining a “reputation as a sort of travelling vaudeville” show (13), the Hudson’s Bay Company tires of governing the 1.5 million square miles of Rupert’s land, which it had owned since 1670. In 1869, as Sweatman’s story begins, the Hudson’s Bay Company sells Rupert’s land to “an Eastern, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon powerhouse” without mentioning the sale to the people living in the Red River colony (29).

Blondie narrates her father’s, mother’s, and her own concerns about this transfer of ownership. She addresses her thoughts directly to the reader: “But if *Canada* wanted to buy their land, why couldn’t they buy it from the people who were living here? Indian, Métis, French. Is there an original owner of such land?” (29-30). Her dad’s thoughts, “This is what comes from settling down . . . . You become simultaneously self-righteous and hypocritical. Where did he and Alice belong if not here, on the banks of the Red, the land bought from the Cree? And now bought again from under them by this *thing*, this *Canada*” (30). Her mother’s concerns center on the growing “rubber ball” in her belly, and Blondie appeals to her reader from her mother’s womb, feeling both an urgency to be born and a guilt for the consequences her adventure will incur: Blondie’s “innocent demands” appear to be responsible for the colonization of this “raw and beautiful place, St. Norbert, the land [her father] had begun to love” (30). As Alice, Peter, and Blondie begin their adventure as squatters and colonizers, the “expression of their lives” is already “one extended double entendre” (13).

These actions set into motion a re-telling of specific historical events, in which the McCormack women infiltrate the Empire's regulatory network. In a whirlwind tour spanning 109 years of history, they wend their way through the Empire's battlefields, from the Riel rebellion, WWI, WW II, the African Boer war, two labour strikes, to the cold war and the nuclear age. They play soldiers, rub elbows with revolutionaries, and inspect the Empire's battlefield and its capitalist mansion up close.

While Sweatman presents a daunting and seemingly impenetrable network of colonization that slides from British imperialism to fascism to American capitalism, she also introduces the McCormack women as savvy, sexy women, each extraordinary in her own way. Alice, a theological student and the McCormack family matriarch, turns her back on years of theological study and starts a "family tradition of studying passionately all things extraneous to survival" (7). She is a master of the Word and words, trained in theology, as well as transvestism, the ancient art of feigned diminution, hyperbole, and histrionics. She opens a Histrionic school and theater under the motto, "'Histrionics, Hyperbole, and How! . . . Push it till it falls over!'" (279). Blondie, Alice's daughter, is 109 years of age and "dead as a stick" in the prologue of the novel, and yet she is the "sexy" and "provocative" narrator of her own conception, birth, and life (2). Her body houses an over abundance of static electricity. Blondie's daughter, Helen, "a desperado of luxury," is born with an unearthly beauty and a fractured soul (190). She plays the objectified wife, the voyeur, the hobo, and the soldier, and at the same time spins into being a new leading man, Bill, to accommodate her story. Dianna, Helen's daughter, presents as a child prodigy: she is born with "such a degree of consciousness" that she "filled her father with awe" (370). She plays a spinster lawyer, a physicist, and a politically charged war artist until, in 1956, Dianna's virginity goes nuclear and erupts in the most exaggerated, erotic, and political orgasm of all the McCormack women.

Although *When Alice Lay Down With Peter* is playful, seemingly filled with contemporary literary and cultural theories as well as with historical events, there are many brief book reviews published, but few scholarly articles.<sup>6</sup> For instance, Nicole Markotic describes Sweatman's adventure story as a "sketch" of historical events, and Sweatman's characters as "'History Tourists,'" which makes the novel "fun," but

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<sup>6</sup> More book reviews on the data base, Canadian Business & Current Affairs, Complete.

predictable, and destines the women to be mere “backdrop” in an historical epic (156). Markotic notes, “For the most part, the women in this novel have two proscribed roles: to dress as men and then to have babies (sometimes they have babies and then dress as men)” (156). She sees Alice’s sex scene as “Not very agreeable,” but “fruitful,” and Blondie’s as “extravagant” (156), as if too exaggerated and unbelievable. While Markotic appreciates the “magic realism element” in the “conception scenes,” which she says was “obviously meant to be historical, sensational, *farfetched*” (157), she describes them as being “so overwrought that I felt I was being hit by lightning to make sure I got the point” (157). Again, she uses the word “overwrought,” as if even conception is overdone, and somehow, too excessive. Markotic cannot envision the female body as passionate and dramatic, and instead longs “for a scene celebrating the ordinary,” one that tells her “who these characters really were” (157).

Reinhold Kramer, on the other hand, describes Sweatman’s novel as a “postmodern historical novel” (172). He senses a “romantic depth of feeling” (172), which, coupled with “magic realism” (173), “allows the reader to approach historical cruxes obliquely: to remember the moments that made us, and to play among them” (172). However, Kramer suggests that when Sweatman “attempts to invest historical cruxes with emotion, the results are often politically predictable”: “one need only be the right sort of white person” to sift out the “right side” of rebellions, revolutions, and world wars (172). Kramer thinks Sweatman’s “struggle for female emancipation” is best served when the novel “veers away from History’s big moments and . . . brings us private, felt lives,” arguing that a woman’s “truth” is more “convincing” if it comes “from domestic nuances and their political implications, rather than from direct political choices” (173). Kramer proves his point by directing the reader to Blondie’s line: “The white collars on men are political forces never to be underestimated. Richard was in his element. Everybody was his father” (292). For Kramer, a woman’s “truth” is convincing only when it reiterates Richard, as a truth.

Herb Wyile’s scholarly article, “‘It Takes More Than Mortality to Make Somebody Dead’: Spectres of History in Margaret Sweatman’s *When Alice Lay Down with Peter*” views Sweatman’s novel as a magic realist text, and he centers his discussion on “ghost” play, which is central to the genre (735). He argues that ghost play is “an

important part in the genre's melding of a rational, empirical order and a supernatural and/or mythical order" (735). Ghostly play, Wyile says, quoting David Danow, provides a medium through which the McCormack women can raise troubling questions concerning not only the ownership of land, but also the authenticity of superimposing "one perceived reality upon another" until it becomes an "indubitable norm" and the only "'true' reality" (735). Recognizing that the "novel's critical energies are directed principally at the forces of colonialism and capitalism, both of which thrive by manipulating and / or erasing the past" (741), Wyile insists that "Ghosts play a pivotal role within Blondie's narrative in resisting such a strategic cultivation of amnesia" (741).

Marie's ghost, for example, plays a "comforting rather than disturbing presence," serving "as a kind of spectral elder" and "presiding over the land which belongs (if it belongs to anybody) to her" (743). She "also functions as a barometer of catastrophe" (743), for instance, wailing and moaning at certain points throughout the text (743). The ghost of Thomas Scott, on the other hand, "represents the wider forces of history," whereas Helen's ghost "emphasizes that the political is also personal" (747). Both Scott and Helen's ghosts "caution against the dangers of political absolutes" (745). As if in passing, Wyile mentions that Blondie's "spectral narrative" haunts the text with a post colonial unease (738). The ghosts, according to Wyile, conduct "a dialogue between myth and history while resisting the eclipse of either one of them" (748), but Wyile thinks nothing of eclipsing Blondie's voice.

Unlike Markotic, Kramer, and Wyile, Wayne Tefs, in his unnamed review of the novel, centers his discussion on Margaret Sweatman, as an "inventive writer: experimental, daring. Maybe even brash" and her "larger than life" characters, the McCormack women (83). To him, Sweatman's writing "intersects rhythmic expectations with fragments, with run-ons, with interrogative," and "performs the verbal high-wire act, seeming at times to teeter at the abyss, then calling herself back." Sweatman's "edgy" prose is complemented by her "larger than life," "eccentric" characters, who know who they are and do not make any apologies: "they are simply announced to us." The story opens with an "explosive" and "dramatic moment" of sexual gratification and conception: "quite a beginning for both novel and heroine" (Tefs 83).

Realizing that the McCormack women inhabit a fictional world, and make up their stories as they go along, Tefs' interest lies in how these "larger than life" women deal with an "increasingly complex and malign political world" (83). He points to one of the "oddities of the book," not that Blondie is a dead narrator, but that as Blondie re-visits historical events, becoming both "wiser" and "sadder," there is a point somewhere near the middle of the novel when her story transforms into her daughter, Helen's, and then Helen's story transforms into her daughter, Dianna's. Within this transformation, Blondie continues to narrate historical updates, but their larger than life political agendas seem banal when juxtaposed against her descendant's evolving "feelings" and explosive "reactions to specific events." It is "as if Blondie were there, inside them, witnessing the events over their shoulders, sharing their inner torments and responses." How peculiar, Tefs argues, that during the first half of the novel Alice and Blondie act as "icons more than personalities," but as Blondie's story unfolds Sweatman "wrenches the consistency of point," and individual personalities emerge in powerful emotive performatives (83).

Sweatman's discussion in "The future of Prairie Lit.; [Final Edition]" is similar to Tefs' in that she challenges the writer to celebrate "'the odd, the peculiar': Writers are in danger of becoming ordinary and obedient to a North American marketplace" (D 13).<sup>7</sup> She quotes from science writer, the late Stephen Jay Gould's "evolutionary theory," "'Odd arrangements and funny solutions are the proof of evolution—paths that a sensible God would never tread, but that a natural process, constrained by history, follows perforce.'" She invites writers to move away from "safe" stories that the publishers want, the "'small miracles' in middle-class families, wherein Money, in its excess or its scarcity, is as air, a non-toxic, odourless gas; so much a part of the environment, it is no longer visible." Sweatman encourages writers to explore a world beyond "the banal details of middle-class life" with its "small, barely noticeable climaxes, a sort of oh-not-tonight-dear literature." On a public podium, Sweatman encourages writers to desire and celebrate the extraordinary climaxes in life, whether they be "odd" or "peculiar" (D13).

In a previous article, "On the virtues of analogy: Margaret Sweatman on working with other disciplines," Sweatman had elaborated on what she meant by the

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<sup>7</sup> Sweatman's article, "The future of Prairie Lit.; [Final Edition], contains her speech, delivered at the "Expanding Prairie Horizons 2020 symposium in Winnipeg" (D13).

extraordinary, speaking directly to the reader: “Perhaps it is the same with you. A simple attraction to ecstasy. The lurching desire for communication. To see eye-to-eye and tooth-to-tooth. To merge. To mess with” (34). Indeed, the “joy of analogy” is “A writerly pleasure, like punning, like the leap of metaphor. To merge and coincide is to go out.” Writers, directors, and actors, “play House and Politics, we play Love and Anger. We work quickly to generate an excess of words” (34). Then comes collaboration: “When words are communal, the nomadic writer sheds all but a stick of wood and a match” (34). During this collaborative process, a performance may be pulled back and stripped of its ecstasy, or the directors and actors can strike the match, light the stick, and fuel their own performances in their desire for ecstasy.

Interdisciplinary work, Sweatman argues, is “fuelled by analogy,” suggesting that disciplines “such as music, theatre, visual art, dance, are extremely generative” (“On the virtues of analogy” 34). By glancing sideways “into the confines of a colleague’s art form, we map escape routes from our own prisons . . . . And in a combinatorial piece we have access to other emotional affects. A writer, starving on a diet of paper, is given a body, voices, breath, and maybe a microphone, lighting, a stage” (34). Blondie says, in the novel, that birth is the “end of ecstasy,” end of passion (51), but Sweatman and her characters dispute ecstasy’s inevitable end. Not to celebrate Sweatman’s novel from a perspective of drama and ecstasy is to miss, I think, the richness of Sweatman’s performative writing and the sexy body performing. Thus, I have chosen to glance sideways, and examine Sweatman’s novel through the lens of performance theory, focusing principally on Richard Schechner’s books, *Essays on Performance Theory* (1977) and *Performance Theory* (2003), Della Pollock’s article, “Performing Writing” (1998), and Judith Butler’s book, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993). Since there are few scholarly analyses of this novel published, this is the contribution to scholarship that my thesis intends to make.

To understand the transitive nature of performance, a diversion into the field of performance studies is necessary. Richard Schechner is still querying the shifting nature of performance studies after forty years of teaching, writing, and he resorts to analogy: it is “The sidewinder . . . that moves across the desert floor by contracting and extending itself in a sideways motion. Wherever this beautiful rattlesnake points, it is not going

there. Such (in)direction is characteristic of performance studies” (“What is Performance Studies Anyway” 357). Sidewinding “its way across the deserts of academia,” or if I might add the Empire’s adventure playground, performance studies tricks, alarms, amuses, and mocks (357). It “resists or rejects definition” and “transgresses boundaries, it goes where it is not expected to be,” but refuses to “be pinned down or located exactly” (360). The transforming nature of performance studies pushes cultural and postmodern critics and the reader into moments of suspended belief, within which the impossible becomes possible.

Traditionally, Schechner argues that these moments of performance were experienced in “play, games,” and “sports,” but by the 1960’s and 1970’s, quoting Nathan Stucky, they had evolved into the “‘Performance of Literature’” (WIPSA 357-358, 359). However, before it had an opportunity to take hold as a discipline, performance studies had already expanded its boundaries “to include cultural performances, personal narratives, everyday-life performances, non-fiction, [and] ritual” (WIPSA 359). Performance studies, according to Schechner’s overview, continued to defy categorization, and expanded into “‘performance art,’ ‘mixed-media,’ ‘Happenings,’ or ‘intermedia.’” (WIPSA 361). These interdisciplinary events blurred the boundaries, “separating art from life and genres from each other,” and theorists, for example Judith Butler, began to “examine ‘performative behavior’—how people play gender, heightening their constructed identity, performing slightly or radically different selves in different situations” (WIPSA 361). This interdisciplinary blurring enabled “Any event, action, item or behavior” from everyday life to scientific experimentation, from historical specific events to theoretical debate to be examined ‘as’ performance.

Schechner cautions that when approaching any “phenomenon” from the perspective of performance, one “must not lose sight of each specific performance’s particularities of experience, structure, history, and process” (WIPSA 361). For instance, when Wyile portrays Blondie as a ghost, he is dismissing both the concreteness of her role as narrator and her conception, birth, and life as celebrated and recorded events. However, if Blondie is presented from a perspective of performance, these same roles mark “identities, bend and remake time, adorn and reshape the body, tell stories, and allow people to play with . . . not-for-the-first-time” behaviour (WIPSA 361). Blondie is



then perceived, not as post colonial unease, but as a sidewinder, authorizing her identity through performance. The sidewinder's ability to mark identity, coupled with its talent to weave through, expose, reverse, and play with the prescribed text as performative, Schechner argues, complements both the body performing a solid selfhood and the writing of script and theory.

Performance's transitive nature, Schechner contends, opens a world beyond the text, while dramatic literature remains a "fixed text," "where the item received is fixed and what changes are the circumstances of reception and the audience" (Harding, "Interview" 202). For example, in Sweatman's novel, Alice produces, directs, and acts in her rendition of a Ben Hur/ Adolf Hitler production at the Walker theatre the day before Armistice, on November 10. The play becomes a victim of bad timing. Eli plays a German general and another actor plays "this fellow Hitler" (280), but the presence of German helmets on the stage upsets Alice's war-weary audience (281). They refuse to entertain another war story and settle for a period of peace and a promise of no more war.

Performance, on the other hand, "is a very inclusive notion of action" (Schechner, EPT 1). It is "contingent, supple, changing, flexible as it is being 'written' or 'composed' and as it is being received; and . . . the moment of composition and the moment of reception are identical" (Harding, "Interview" 202). Within this action, play, according to Schechner, is an underestimated performance strategy that utilizes imitation, repetition, and exaggeration to re-order behavior within a "protected time/space," a performance "workshop" (EPT 60). Sweatman compares this idea of the performance workshop to the "stage," envisioning it as "a forum" for experimentation, where "actors memorize their lines and then unremember them so that at each cue they are brought forth as if for the first time. It feels dangerous" ("On the virtues of analogy" 34). For instance, Helen's daughter, Dianna, is "born with her eyes wide open . . . as if what she was seeing for the first time was a confirmation of some earlier appraisal" (370), but as her life begins in an elongated ellipsis in Part Six, "she rubs her forehead," and wonders "Where are we?" (385). These ellipses and full stop moments of unremembering and re-thinking are sprinkled throughout the novel and allow space for Sweatman's characters to play with different roles, escape a dangerous scene, or start over. Notably, as the ellipses expand, the linearity of the text is disrupted. Up until Dianna's ellipsis, each part of the text is

introduced as a specific historical time period, for example Part One 1869, but by Part Six, the situating historical date is absent. Performance allows for this re-visiting, re-acting, and re-writing of a life in a protected space, without fear of retribution.

However, within the Empire's adventure story, the male adventurer's play is being mentored and monitored by older voyageurs and the Empire. Anthropologically, play has been associated with the ritual of the hunt. It can be "strategic, future-and-crisis-oriented, violent and/or combative" with "winners and losers, leaders and followers; it employs costumes and/or disguises . . . it has a beginning, middle and end" (Schechner, *Performance Theory* 108). Historically, this play has been transformed into the "'serious work'" of men in "'war games' and 'theatres of war'" (PT 107). Since this "play behaviour," a fight or flight pattern, according to Schechner, is an adaptation of the hunt, hunting becomes "a kind of playing" (PT 108). Schechner refers to Caroline Loizos' "review of the functions of play in non-human primates" to substantiate his claims: it is a space of "schooling or practice for the young," "an escape from or alternative to stress," "a source of 'vital information' about the environment" and an "exercise for muscles involved in agonistic and reproductive behavior" (EPT 53). Thus, the Empire's adventure playground is not just an environment of transformation from boyhood to manhood, which re-affirms Phillips' argument, but it is also a controlled environment in which the Empire usurps the adventurer's potency as its own agency and leaves the male adventurer acting out as an 'effect,' replaying a static, biologically determined performative of survival and procreation.

While the male adventure story presents as static and predictable, Sweatman's characters engage in moments of creative play that are additive and elaborate, fun and dangerous. In Chapter 1, Alice's humorous, metaphysical, and staged play, as a sidewinder, compassionate soul, and founder of her Histrionic theater and school, inject historical cruxes with humor, emotion, and anarchy that result in unpredictable social and political meaning. For instance, during Alice's staged play, a Ben Hur/Adolf Hitler production, the McCormack women are jailed for performing anarchy, but are 'sprung' by Richard, who is the prototype of the Empire. In Chapter 2, Sweatman, if I might use Loizos' terms, organizes Blondie's play into its own "logical sequence" (Schechner, EPT 54). Blondie's new-born body presents within the adventure playground as a jokester

first and then as a sexed body. In Chapter 3, Sweatman adds “playmates” and combines all “kinds” of play in a more serious and worldly performance (EPT 54). For example, it is Richard, the Empire’s own soldier, who helps Dianna fortify her home against the flood even though Dianna initially sees the flood as the Empire’s penetrating force. Kramer suggests that when Sweatman “attempts to invest historical cruxes with emotion, the results are often politically predictable” (172), but the reverse is more true.

Performance, as illustrated by Schechner, enables performance artists such as Sweatman to approach the text from a vantage point of passion that is outside the Empire’s jurisdiction and yet to claim space within its adventure playground. Now two forces, one combative, the other reproductive, covet the same ‘textual’ cover and meet between the same ‘textual’ sheets, but at a level of performance where “Elements exchange, interpenetrate and transform—but there is no hierarchy that permanently or *a priori* puts any life process ‘above’ any other” (EPT 30). Although the Empire is unaware of Sweatman’s shift to a world of performance, and continues to act its story, thinking its textual and discursive boundaries impermeable, performance seems to privilege the McCormack women with an amnesic property, whereby they are aware of the Empire’s manipulating discourse and yet repeatedly join the Empire on its own battlefields. At the same time, a woman’s passion has had experience both outside the Empire’s story and within it. It has been banished and yet kept alive by women, although it was often nurtured in secrecy. Blondie steps out of her role and directs her thoughts to the reader, saying that women have always spilled “a little juice,” simply for pure pleasure, even way back then (266).

Performative writing, like Schechner’s theory of performance, is difficult to pinpoint. Della Pollock describes it in her article, “Performing Writing,” as “*evocative*,” operating “metaphorically to render absence present—to bring the reader into contact with ‘other- worlds,’” and these worlds evoke “worlds of memory, pleasure, sensation, imagination, affect, and in-sight” (80). Pollock argues that “performative writing spins . . . on the axis of impossible” (76), and the joint collaboration between performative writing, the actor, and the reader transforms the performing body into a space of creation and liberation or as Sweatman suggests, “ecstasy.” For instance, in Alice’s love-making scene, the reader, to use Pollock’s terms, experiences Alice’s passion and the image of

bodies touching “takes on its own agency” (81). The body “performs” Alice “and through” Alice, and “us,” the reader is “now caught in a . . . *ménage à trois* of looking/feeling/wanting” that kind of passion, as discourse (81). In a grand gesture, the body simultaneously becomes discourse and acts as its own citation, displacing the commands of the Empire’s discursive. The Empire’s citational commands of ‘it’s a girl’ and ‘I do’ of the marriage ceremony, and the insubordination and expectations surrounding those words, are rendered redundant. Sweatman speaks of the “pleasure in the lightness of performative writing,” as a space that provides “relief from the deprivations” that repeat in “literature” (“On the virtues of analogy” 34).

While this transformation appears to be ‘out there,’ beyond possibility, the reader sees Alice and Peter’s sexy bodies “fourteen hours later, still coupled,” not banished, but smothered in the very real Manitoba gumbo (7). This performing, sexy body exceeds the categorical textual distinction of presence, and accommodates the paradigm shift from a textual world to a world of performance. For instance, after Alice and Peter’s love-making scene, Isaiah’s “Cow and calf” vanish, as if Blondie’s conception within a surge of electricity alters the Empire’s story and the reader’s imagination (7). Although Sweatman says that “The game’s rules are domesticated” in performative writing and acting “to the extent that it must, however wildly, appear to be plausible,” “Living inside a theatrical production, the rules of reality shift to accommodate an imaginative logic” (“On the virtues of analogy” 34). The shifting nature of Schechner’s “sidewinder” complements the shifting nature of performative writing.

As Pollock further defines her idea of performative writing, she hints at deliberate erasure. She argues that “performative writing . . . slips the choke hold” on conventional science (81). While Sweatman does shift in that direction, mocking René Descartes and critically examining the physicist, she then sidewinds, refusing to erase any story. Instead, Blondie uses Descartes’ theory of radical doubt to prove his mind/body dualism fraudulent. According to Pollock, performative writing “shifts the operative social paradigm from the scientific ‘what if’ (what *then*?) to its performative counterpart, ‘as if’ (what *now*?), drawing the reader into a projected im/mediacy that never . . . forgets its own genealogy in performance” (81). No longer is science centered on its ends, causality and validity, as the Empire is on the spoils of war, but it now joins Sweatman’s ‘as if-

what now' performance, transforming endings into new beginnings. Science "moves *with*, operates alongside, sometimes through, rather than above or beyond" an "unpredictable, discontinuous rush of . . . (performed) experience" (81). Sweatman "confounds normative distinctions between critical and creative . . . 'true' and 'false'" (81). For example, Dianna, as both a physicist and a war artist, transforms the atomic potential harnessed in the nuclear age into the most exaggerated orgasm of all the McCormack women. While Sweatman resists erasure, she condones shameless plagiarism as a performance strategy. Sweatman usurps science and the scientist, the legitimizing force of the Empire, and transforms their energy into the legitimizing force of her adventure into ecstasy.

While Schechner's idea of performance enables the McCormack women to track, explore, and mentor their bodies, as sidewinders, within a world of performance, and Sweatman's performative writing accommodates this paradigm shift, Judith Butler, a post-structuralist theorist, argues that there is nothing beyond the text. She contends that both the male and female gendered performances "work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and . . . to materialize the body's sex . . . in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative" (*Bodies That Matter* 2). If the gendered performative is symbiotically, or as Sweatman argues, parasitically attached to the Empire, then the actor within the Empire's adventure "is neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration by which both 'subjects' and 'acts' come to appear at all" (BTM 9). The 'I' that emerges out of this performative cannot be known separate from this cultural process. For instance, the citation 'it's a girl' implies an immediate subordination and an expectation of marriage. The marriage ceremony and the verbal citation of 'I do,' in turn, reiterate a heterosexual hegemony that secures the perpetuation of the Empire's discursive authority (BTM 237). Since individual particularities within this cultural process manifest only as gestures of a discursive authority, the "disruptive return" (BTM 8) of the erased is difficult to imagine as "the 'I' becomes, to a certain extent unknowable . . . when it no longer incorporates the norm in such a way that makes this 'I' fully recognizable" (UG 3). Thus, Butler argues, the only adventure story men and women can perform is the gender performative, reaffirming Phillips' argument.

Sweatman admits that, at first, she had reservations about the "Dramatic form:"

It “seemed to me at first to be quadriplegic; in the absence of narration, stuck in real time, without the shadings of interior monologue, seemingly without digression, how the hell does anyone convey a story?” (“On the virtues of analogy” 34). But in a later work, Sweatman remembers the “favourite expression” of teacher and writer, Robert Kroetsch. He would “nod, and say, ‘That would be a major shift of the paradigm.’ He spoke half in jest, and open form, an aspect of his gnomic pedagogy, leaving much to our imaginations.” To reinforce Kroetsch’s point, Sweatman relates his example: Kroetsch “brought forward the simplest matter, the detritus of the homesteader—the Seed Catalogue—and created a new form, synthesized: the old forms deep in its genetic memory; its surfaces altered to meet the present, and to invent the future” (“The future of Prairie Lit” D 13).

Taking her lead from Kroetsch, Sweatman stretches the “fixity” of dramatic literature to accommodate her world, as performance, and immediately new possibilities present. Using textuality as her stage, Sweatman incorporates a narrator, “the shadings of interior monologue,” and digressions. For instance, Sweatman and Blondie, as shameless plagiarist and narrator, do not just mimic the adventure story’s creative process, but usurp bits and pieces of the Empire’s adventure story and transform them into the origin of their adventure. They do this repeatedly, and to such an exaggerated extent that by the beginning of Blondie’s retelling, all that is left of the Empire’s story is a decaying “fence of willow posts” (1). Sweatman turns the Empire’s discursive back on itself, noting that because the Empire’s force is without “subject” or “act,” and merely a “series of normativizing injunctions” (BTM 14-15), it has weakened its own discursive authority and is responsible for its own demise. Resisting erasure, the Empire’s ruins are still present in the prologue of the novel, but just barely, and perform as mere backdrop to Blondie’s emotive and politically charged adventure story.

The Empire’s regulatory network is riddled with vulnerable gaps, but not all are of Sweatman’s making. For instance, to ensure the Empire’s discursive authority, the adventure story had mythologized, theologized, and historicized Eve’s banishment from Eden as a truth, and Eve’s fall became part of the Empire’s regulatory network that assured its reiteration. But this act of banishment also corroborates that Eve’s passion did claim materiality and space within the adventure story and it is now claiming materiality

and space elsewhere. Since it is only ‘missing,’ a trail must exist to and from its origin, and that map to a woman’s banished passion is now sitting in the ruins of the Empire’s story for Sweatman’s sidewinding women to usurp, trace to its origin, and perform for all women.

Arguably, if the Empire’s regulatory network crumbles into ruins, it follows that the gender performative also short-circuits, leaving men and women trapped and repeating an old script, but getting confused and bungling their roles. Still, Butler insists that the gender performative is not without agency and does identify the presence of a ‘willful I,’ which is separate from “the gendered fabrication of the body,” but as Edwina Barvosa-Carter argues in *Butler Matters*, quoting Seyla Benhabib, its “agency” is only in its “ability to vary the repetition of gender performances,” as a parodic resister (177). Butler suggests, in her later work, *Undoing Gender*, that this ‘willful I’ is connected to the body’s “sexuality,” and is “never fully reducible to the ‘effect’ of this or that operation of regulatory power” (15). Just because it has been “socially *constructed*,” she argues, does not mean it is necessarily “socially *determined*” (Barvosa-Carter 177). If a woman’s passion survives within the Empire’s adventure story, it does so just barely. When Alice plays this part in the gender performative, Blondie narrates: “I could make out the dark hair of her sex through the fabric, something that would make the devil himself cry out” (80). Nevertheless, a woman’s fragmented passion is lying vulnerable within the ruins of an old story, estranged from its origin and agency, but free to entertain escape.

Since Richard stands waiting in the ruins of his old story without a script and leading lady, and since this is a retelling, Sweatman and the McCormack women usurp Richard’s story and begin their adventure into passion, once again. The McCormack women, as sidewinders, play alongside the male adventurer, as voyeurs, shameless plagiarists, and war artists, tricking the Empire into welcoming passion back into its adventure story, while at the same time, reconnecting the ‘willful I’ of the sexed body, the “small” climax, with its passion, and enabling the female body to birth, map, and celebrate itself as its own Big Bang, *repeatedly*.

In Chapter 1, Alice sidewinds her way through the Empire’s adventure playground as a jokester and a shameless voyeur armed with the performance strategies

of hyperbole and histrionics. While Butler sees the gender performative as inescapable, Alice changes gender roles as easily as she changes her clothes. Sweatman views the gender performative as an act necessary for the Empire's regulatory system to repeat, as Butler contends, but models a performance in which the act can just as easily short-circuit the Empire's discourse. Chapter 2 marks Blondie's return to the adventure story, and her use of hyperbole and histrionics to manifest the female body as a bodily discourse and another truth. It is not an easy transition, as Butler points out, but in a world of performance, Sweatman argues, it is not impossible to escape the socialization of the Empire. In Chapter 3, Helen utilizes hyperbole and histrionics to play a savvy woman, an objectified wife, and a soldier until her death within the Empire's textual world, while her daughter Dianna uses the same performance strategies to stage, map, document, and perform Sweatman's idea of womanhood into being, at once within Blondie's garden and on a world stage.

Chapter 1: In the beginning . . . Alice . . . 'as if' . . . what then?

*Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.*



--Oscar Wilde

In the prefatory pages of *When Alice Lay Down With Peter*, Sweatman appears to acknowledge the authority of the Empire's discursive performance, which, for her, begins and ends with Isaiah's idea of intimacy. Isaiah's words are a recognizable biblical passage from which the Empire has extrapolated its idea of intimacy and so Sweatman deliberately gives them a page of their own, after the title page, but before the author's note, suggesting their authority, and yet noticeably leaving them outside the story:

*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.*

*And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

--Isaiah 11:6-7, 9

This citation, for Sweatman, sums up the totality of the British Empire's adventure story, a totality that breeds perfection and obedience and represents a 'coded' utterance, a utopia, that her readers can easily recognize: it is a "utopia" that breeds "total agreement, the extreme familiarity, intimacy" (303). Sweatman juxtaposes this utopian adventure story against its familiar, reinforcing Christian Adam and Eve story, connecting the adventurer's free 'play' in a foreign land to Adam and Eve's free 'play' in the Garden of Eden. Peter assures Alice that there is "a land without landlords just across the ocean, a green and verdant place where a man could be free from tyranny, free from history itself" (8). Sweatman appears to align Alice's soul-searching mission to find spiritual fulfillment with Isaiah's idea of intimacy and the promise of adventure: "Alice saw the perfection of the sunlight on rock, grass, sea. *Perfection*. She studied it all afternoon, until the light grew diffuse, became a green membrane over the world" (10). However, the common denominator between this Edenic idea of perfection and the adventure story

is obedience to the ‘word’ of the Empire, which is exactly what infringes on the freedom of both the male adventurer and Alice: Alice “thought about the university, which had long represented for her the keyhole to freedom, and she saw it as the funnel through which freedom poured itself into obedience” (9). Although the male and female adventurers may desire their own experience, they are afraid to envision an adventure that opposes the mandate of Isaiah as interpreted by the Empire: “strangely embarrassed, Alice quickly drew St. Augustine’s *Confessions* from her bag and pretended to read” (8). Playing with this conundrum, Sweatman frees Alice, along with other male adventurers, to board a ship and leave for “York Factory, on the shores of Hudson Bay” (10), where they will ‘play’ side by side on the adventure playground. However, the male adventurer will unknowingly perform a prescribed adventure performative that will ultimately funnel his freedom back to obedience and the Empire, substantiating Phillips’ and Butler’s theories, while Alice, mimicking Schechner’s sidewinder, will critique and deflate its authority as the ‘only’ story.

In the Author’s note, before the novel begins, Sweatman suggests that her novel will model an alternate script. She challenges her readers to imagine, along with Blondie, a different ‘kind’ of intimacy, one that, although it “draws on historical research,” is “born both of the imagination, and of the landscape, an oxbow in the Red River” (vii), an intimacy that challenges the interpretation of the adventure story as an historical fact. For example, Sweatman discusses Louis Riel’s involvement in the Métis resistance as a story that “provokes either passionate loyalty or bitterness in many Canadians,” depending on whose story is recorded (vii). To some, Riel “was mad, or a liquor trader”; to others, Riel was a “visionary” (vii). Already Sweatman, mimicking Schechner’s shifting sidewinder, has opened her readers’ minds to the possibility that what has been documented as historical fact may not be the only truth, and, consequently, if the story is not necessarily true, then the narrator of the story may not be credible either. Sweatman subtly juxtaposes Isaiah’s recognizable words against this new, as yet unfamiliar, citation of Blondie McCormack, suggesting that both Isaiah and Blondie are storytellers, and that Isaiah’s idea of intimacy and the resulting adventure story may not be any more real than Blondie’s work of fiction and her idea of intimacy. Performative writing, for Sweatman, is ‘citational,’ and, therefore, her acknowledgment of Isaiah’s idea of intimacy and then

her refusal to reiterate that idea as the only story foreshadows her intention to challenge Isaiah's words as the only truth.

Sweatman plays with the shifting nature of performance, freeing Blondie to dispel Isaiah's theological citation as a prescribed performative, once again, within the first pages of the novel. Alice, Blondie's mother, after years of theological study, sneezes and makes a sudden and deliberate decision that her longing for spiritual fulfillment, the pursuit of love, and subsequent freedom must be pursued under the disguise of a man in a new land that is supposedly devoid of history. Humorously, Alice has this revelation while preparing for her "examination on the methods of salvation" (8), which had been the focus of her study as the only "female theology student at the University of Glasgow" (7). She dismisses her years of study in one grand gesture: "a sudden sneeze filled her with a need to smell the most northern sea" (8). On a hill overlooking the sea, Alice analyzes her past and realizes that her faith had been bred "on a meager diet of duty and intellect" (7). Alice's exaggerated 'sneeze' liberates her from the constraints of the theological word as she 'acts out' against the totality of obedience and familiarity that the Word and the Empire mandate. Sweatman deflates the citational authority of the Empire; however, she is careful to maintain Alice as an authority of the Word.

Alice's life turning on a sneeze may be impulsive, but Sweatman exaggerates it into a sophisticated and calculating act that allows Alice to imagine her own 'Adam.' Alice lets "St. Augustine fall closed, squeezing the book between her thighs as she leaned towards this stranger and kissed him on his lips, which, she discovered, tasted salty, for the air was full of sea" (9). While deliberately defining her love for Peter in naïve edenic terms, envisioning him, with an "Adam's apple" floating "on his freckled throat," a "voice like the wind on the water," and "his words arriving as if out of nowhere" (8), Alice kisses Peter's very real "raw neck" and weather-beaten, calloused hands, gnawing at them as if she had long been "denied some vital nutrient" (9). Under the disguise of edenic love, Alice feeds her own desire for passion and freedom, equating her reawakening sensuality with "spinning possibilities" of adventure (9). No longer embarrassed, Alice is perched bird-like, ready to exchange her theological roots for an adventure that will funnel obedience and duty back into love and freedom: "She was wearing a black Methodist gown. Her black-laced boots were spread pigeon-toed,

careless and ready” (8). Admitting that she has “looked for God in all the wrong places,” Alice decides to pursue her passionate feelings under the lady-like banner of “love” (9). Sweatman exaggerates and builds Alice’s calculated performative of anarchy, as love, amidst a sneeze and a kiss, while, at the same time, pointing out the naivety of edenic love.

Mocking this edenic image of love, and yet usurping its imagined perfection to ignite her quest for love and liberty, Alice disguises herself as a man and propels herself forward into action. She “cut off her hair,” “put on a pair of trousers,” and accepts a “job on a boat sailing out of Stromness for York Factory, on the shores of Hudson Bay. She proves useful aboard ship, and arrives with the reputation of a popular young lad capable of work that demanded more finesse than muscle” (10). However, her perfect vision of the Hudson Bay that she dreamt of in Orkney is quickly dispelled when she steps off the boat. She queries, “Where was the perfection she had witnessed at Orkney? A vision of sun upon ocean waves breaking perfectly on the rocks, it had fostered her manhood and stirred her desire” (11). Sweatman subtly displaces Alice’s naïve, but familiar, edenic perfection that protects Isaiah’s idea of intimacy under a green membrane that covers the world, with a very real and messy “sea of mud,” Manitoba gumbo (11). Already, Sweatman’s characters and readers are privy to a space of contestation in that what they have assumed to be real may be fiction.

From this space of contention, at the cusp between obedience and disobedience, the familiar and the sensual, the perfect and the imperfect, Alice and Peter continue to funnel their real but messy passion into freedom. As ardent lovers and jokesters in love, Alice and Peter’s first love scene, on the opening page of the novel, is titillating and controversial. Since Alice is disguised as a man, “wearing wool pants and a heavy flannel shirt and . . . leather chaps” (5), it appears as if two men are having sex. Amidst their “laughing” and “lovemaking,” Alice is cautious and does not forget “her precarious circumstance,” knowing that they “must interrupt at all costs” and be “careful to spill” (5). However, Alice’s passion cannot be contained within her disguise, or within the text as her fellow adventurers simultaneously lust after her and fear their own homoerotic tendencies: “all the other men had lusted too, and thought there must be something deviant in a lad who could inspire such passion” (11). At once, Sweatman subjects

Isaiah's utopian idea of intimacy and its extreme familiarity, along with the Empire's heterosexual imperative, to the scrutiny of the "most successful practical jokers in all the colony" (5), and exposes her reader to the homophobic and homoerotic nature of the adventure playground. The reader has witnessed the defiant 'spill' of good white seed, oozing into the Manitoba gumbo instead of propagating the new land, and they have connected with a woman who could inspire and produce such passion on the masculine adventure playground.

Dodging that old story of deviance, Sweatman exaggerates Alice's second love-making scene to such myth-making proportions that deviance transforms into its opposite, a moment of pure pleasure and passion: "Her own juice she mistook for his. She thought he'd spilled; she was safely playing on the shores of pleasure" (6). This orgasmic moment of passion becomes the aperture through which Blondie narrates her return to the adventure playground: Blondie is "tipped into the world, off a thundercloud like a huge tarnished tray, tipped like caviar into my mother's womb" (7). Blondie's embryo is "scorched" to her mother's womb, and the time of her return is marked as a historically specific event: "It was two o'clock on the first afternoon of my life as an embryo" (7). Sweatman's performative moment of composition, Alice's passionate reception, and Blondie's conception are identical. Sweatman, Alice, and Blondie, playing with the Empire's heterosexual imperative, blur the lines between an old and a new story with a "dramatic moment early in the novel" (Tefs 83). Sweatman "performs" her "edgy prose" in a "verbal high-wire act" (Tefs 83), which celebrates Alice's sexuality and the return of Blondie's "sexy" and "provocative" body (2), as both citational and evocative.

Sweatman's performative writing not only elevates Blondie's return "off the realistic plane" (83), as Tefs argues, into a world of performance, but also marks Alice's celebration of her sexuality as a historical event on the adventure playground and as an ethical event within the house of God. Acting out passion, previously a banishable offence, is now a subject of contention within the House of God: "My mum and dad, in God's House of Lords, members of the opposition" (5). By moving Alice and Peter across the house, but not out of God's house, Sweatman assures her reader that passion is back to stay. She intimates that Alice and Peter are 'Lords' and suggests the possibility

that God may welcome their re-interpretation of Isaiah's intimacy, or at least a debate, because His Word, like those of Alice and the male adventurer, is also being held captive by the Empire. Freeing the Word and over-shadowing the Empire's authority, Alice's passionate body has already played the jokester on the adventure playground, conceived Blondie, and negotiated a space within the House of God. Sweatman twists and manipulates the 'Word' and its reinforcing adventure story to infiltrate both the Empire's discourse and God's house. Only this time, she funnels obedience and perfection back into passion and freedom.

Alice and Peter continue having fun playing their roles as jokesters, hunters, and lovers within the adventure story, but soon Alice chooses a more dangerous role for them and they team up as creators. Entering unfamiliar territory, Alice and Peter cautiously walk "like a pair of hounds, sniffing at the blossoms of Great Plains lady's tresses" (14), in an urgent need to "re-create themselves" and "heal the story into shapeliness, to make graceful the erratic gestures of a life" (15). But in as much as Alice wants to leave Scotland behind, she is "still an earnest Methodist," and at times of uncertainty, clings to her familial origin: she tells her life story to Peter "all in a breath, fighting for air, stalling the laughter . . . with her heart pressing her larynx and her eyes blind to the aspen stands and swift fox, her memory so full of the particulars of her lost family that she was hyperventilating" (15). Alice's words spill out until Peter covers her mouth with his hand and pulls her into the cattails to avoid being seen by two Red River carts, one carrying five soldiers wearing uniforms "lifted from dead bodies," and the other carrying a woman (15). Sweatman readily accommodates their change in script, and momentarily brings the adventure story to a full stop. Alice's hyperventilating creates a space for Alice and Peter to start again.

Although Alice's history and memories tie her to her family back in Glasgow, in her new life she longs to disconnect herself from that past and reconnect with her lost womanhood: "Blinded by a sudden and irrational grief for womanhood, my mother stumbled out to the middle of the trail and stood helpless, her hands forgotten at her sides, her mouth open, a drop of spittle upon her lip" (16). Alice's body rejects the familiar and steps into the dangerous path of the soldiers, causing their cart to come to a full stop. She does not know the script, but trusts her body. The woman riding in the cart, whom

the surveyor derogatorily dismisses as a “bohunk,” intuitively understands Alice’s grief and invites her and Peter to ride along (19). After a ways, the “bohunk” woman tugs at the driver’s sleeve to make him stop, saying something to him in “a language so foreign it sounded counterclockwise,” and waves for Alice to follow (16). Alice, still disguised as a man, accepts her invitation to squat and share a pee:

The woman put her hand under her skirts and withdrew a leather-bound volume of the Bible. It was in English. It was unlikely she realized that it was sacred text from which she tore two pages, both from the Song of Songs, and handed one page to my mother . . . . She smiled as if the common fact of bladders was a source of amusement infinite and humane . . . . They began to laugh while the fragrant pee ran in golden creeks between their feet, and they walked back to the wagon breathless and happy. (16-17)

After squatting, they return to their previous roles, Alice, “the skinny dress-up boy,” (16) and the “bohunk” woman, “once again, solemn as an old photograph and just as gnomic” (17). Ironically, Alice and the “bohunk” woman ‘act out’ under the watchful eyes of the soldiers, who, oddly, do not think it peculiar for a man and a woman to share a pee, but more importantly the women step out of the adventure story to share a joke with the reader. Sweatman’s readers simultaneously imagine the bodies of both women, momentarily free of their prescribed performative, and respond to their foreign and counterclockwise language, their intuitiveness, and their laughter. The reader becomes a co-conspirator in Sweatman’s upstaging of the adventure story as Sweatman and her characters continue to claim a space within the Bible and within the adventure story for the re-interpretation of womanhood. However, at the same time as the women jokingly perform anarchy under the noses of the soldiers who are supposed to quash dissenters, Sweatman is pitting the women against the soldier, igniting an ominous spark that will ultimately have to be played out.

Sweatman continues to steal moments from the adventure story and Alice and Peter deliberately slip further into the Empire’s story. Although Peter trusts Alice to re-create his life along with hers, he seems familiar with the adventure story and fearful of it. Peter momentarily holds Alice back, but she shakes off his “restraining hand,” crawls ahead to the driver’s bench, and asks to see the surveyor’s notebook (17). The surveyor’s

sketches, “artfully” done, capture the beauty of the “marshland, and the stands of maple, poplar, pencilled as if the words themselves were drawings of trees” (17). Alice “could not have been more moved by the sight of a painting at a museum. It was the first time she’d seen her unkempt new country represented in artistic form” (18). Neither Sweatman nor Alice will be restrained by Peter’s hand as they deliberately misread the surveyor’s notebook both to point out to readers a discrepancy between what appears to be and what actually is, and to lodge the surveyor’s artistic vision of Alice’s new country into their imaginations.

Although Alice interprets the map artistically, Peter recognizes an all-too-familiar story. He sees “the surveyor’s scribbles as scars inflicted on his weary freedom,” and later, he runs “his worn fingers over the grid that lay upon the topography like a net, like a snare” (18). Peter points out to Alice the written words at the bottom of the sketch: “‘Little of the land has been cultivated, though the soil is rich black loam. The people who wander through it know nothing of agriculture and will not prove to be desirable landowners. It is my considered opinion that they will never give up their roving habits, unless, perhaps, faced with starvation’” (18). The surveyor’s sketches and words are meant to funnel his artistry back into obedience to the Empire, displacing Alice’s first impressions of his work, as a “land loved by an artist” (18), and Louis Riel’s view of the Canadians: “‘they do not follow the contour of the land with their bizarre maps. It is a madness to place their lines so. Such stupid lines make no way for our cattle to get the water. And the fat size of their claims . . . It is of no sense. Very clumsy, these new people’” (27). The surveyor’s individual perspective is overridden by the Empire’s regulatory network. He is, using Butler’s terms, “neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration” out of which he comes to “appear at all” (BTM 8). Alice, Peter, and Riel, on the other hand, dodge that net, and refuse to imagine a performative of familiarity, fear, and obedience as the only truth.

While Alice’s male disguise allows her to play within the adventure playground, her freedom dissipates and appears to come to a “Full stop” when her pregnancy can no longer be hidden (19). Once again, Sweatman elongates this moment of solitude to accommodate Alice’s conflicting feelings of “joy,” “deep melancholy,” and entrapment (19). As both a disguised man and pregnant woman, Alice improvises and appeals to her



reader: “She removed her hat and rubbed her head. She scratched her invisible balls. The freedom granted by her disguise was abruptly precious, now she was fated to lose it” (19). She exaggerates the hopelessness of her predicament: “She would never in her future life earn as much as she had earned as a boy. She would never enjoy a woman’s labours as she had thrilled to the work offered a scrawny seaman, a novice trapper or an unseasoned cowboy” (19). At the same time that Alice appears to resign herself to this loss of freedom, she scoops “up a twig of seeds . . . and with her nail she peeled seed after seed and put them in her mouth” (19). Alice stands there, at once memorizing her prescribed lines, and then unremembering them.

Changing roles for Alice is as easy as changing her clothes. She sloughs off her male disguise to play the role of a wife and mother within the adventure story. Alice’s Scottish roots assure her and Peter the right to homestead on the adventure playground, and yet as Alice approaches the river bank, a young Cree woman, who has made a home for her family on the river bank, throws Alice and Peter a “diffident glance” (20). Intuitively reading her ‘diffident glance,’ as mistrust, Alice empathizes with the contempt that this young mother feels for the Empire and re-acts: “From her molars, my mother tasted a bilious acid, the flavour of rotten apples. She was throwing up, projectile vomiting . . . . Copious amounts. Things she’s never eaten, food not available in the Red River valley in 1869 . . . . The future cuisine of the Dominion” (21). Although Alice experiences this moment of diffidence and empathy as both a colonizer and a woman, she deliberately clings to her Scottish roots, and claims her right to own land: Alice needs a “home” (21). Alice shifts roles, feeling both uneasy and confident in her choice.

Sweatman and Peter improvise, accommodating Alice’s sidewinding. Peter offers to buy 160 acres from a Cree man with the money that Alice had earned in “her two years,” working “as a man” (22). Alice folds “the ostensible land title,” “put it in her hat, where she had once hidden her money,” and never looks “at it again” (23). The Chief Justice validates Alice’s purchase as Peter’s name and her good Scottish roots displace the Cree (106). However, at the same time as Alice becomes a landowner, she finds out that her property is also the home of Marie, a Métis, who lives in a grotto hidden on the property. Marie, like the Cree woman by the river, is leery when Alice suggests that they share ‘their property,’ but reluctantly agrees. While the Chief Justice thinks that he has

sold the land to desirable landowners, he bungles the Empire's mandate by selling the land to Alice, a woman. But Alice's money is not just buying herself a home. She is buying a home and space for all 'squatting' women, as her land title sanctions the homesteading rights of the Cree and Métis women within the Empire's adventure story.

Even though the Chief Justice may not recognize the Cree, the Métis, or for that matter Alice, as legal landowners, they have claimed space within his jurisdiction. Alice and Peter, jokesters that they are, continue to play with the adventure story. They borrow money from the Chief Justice and start marking 'their' boundaries with fences and build a house, intending to pay back the money. However, when Alice and Peter visit the Chief Justice to pay back their loan, he answers the door drunk: "When he was drunk, he was mean. He had given up sobriety years ago, though he wasn't always so obviously drunk, and he retained the powerful influence over the old Red River Colony" (104). The judge will not let them repay their loan; in fact, he wants them to borrow more money: "'Put on weight' . . . 'Fatten your wife'" (106). If they refuse, he threatens to "investigate the propriety" of their claim: "'Latour Road. That's funny. I thought that was Métis land'" (106). As landowners, it is Peter and Alice's responsibility to lighten the Métis' burden; after all, "'the half-breeds cannot *farm*'" (107). The Chief Justice is authorized to use blackmail, if necessary, to funnel the adventurer's spirit back to obedience: "'Good legislation, good laws, and we'll quiet their claims . . . Put up a new barn. Build fences. It's all on the up and up'" (107). Alice again adapts easily to a role change: "'Up and up,' said Alice . . . 'We must go home.' And took the loan" (107). This drunken rogue, the Chief Justice, is supposed to drive the Métis off their land, but by forcing Alice and Peter to expand and become more successful landowners, the judge, as a representative of the Empire, is granting the Cree and Métis women and Alice a larger space within which to play on the adventure playground. The judge, like the surveyor, nameless men as they are, have no power to act in and of themselves, while Alice, the Cree woman, and Marie play multiple roles within the adventure story, as dissidents, obedient colonists, and savvy women.

As Alice infiltrates the adventure story even deeper, it is inevitable that she must expose the real mandate of Empire, which is to protect already acquired land and to acquire more. Alice willingly jeopardizes her material body as she takes on the roles of

landowner and soldier because she never takes on a role that she does not play “with gusto and more; she loved the excess of her own characterizations” (249). In a comically exaggerated scene, Alice spends her days following Peter around the fence line that protects their property’s boundaries. Blondie narrates her mother’s performative:

She didn’t look up, huddled over as small as a crone. She wore a thin white nightgown so threadbare you could see the shape of her legs through it, and I thought I could make out the dark hair of her sex through the fabric, something that would make the devil himself cry out . . . . As she passed, we heard a supplicant’s gibberish, a Gregorian mix of many tongues, for by then Alice spoke at least thirteen languages, and at that point in my life, it seemed to me she spoke them all at the same time. (80)

Pregnancy does not bring Alice’s body to a “full stop,” but her performance, mimicking the role of the soldier, as the protector of the Empire’s boundaries, certainly does. Sweatman pushes the materiality of the body and its mandate to protect the Empire’s land to such an exaggerated extreme that she achieves its opposite, conformity and disembodiment. Alice is reduced to a “well-trained German Shepherd,” who “will piss on its own frontiers” (80). Sweatman, playing with Butler’s theory of “gender variation,” points out that there is some freedom in playing with disguise as Alice did trick the Empire into recognizing the Cree woman, Marie, and herself as landowners, but this small freedom is realized at the expense of Alice’s voice and passion.

After meeting Louis Riel, Alice and Peter switch roles and allegiances again, and play the dangerous role of the traitor-soldier. Alice, once again, puts on her trousers and she and Peter join Riel’s rebellion as scouts. They are not only casting themselves back into the adventure story as traitors, but also ‘acting out’ the disobedient roles of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They have pushed the lightheartedness of their romp, as jokesters, lovers, hunters, and landowners so far that their romp has become its opposite, anarchy; Alice and Peter are wearing a kind of soldier’s uniform, but for the wrong side. What should be an act of resistance, and therefore empowering, becomes, instead, disheartening because Alice becomes so miserable throughout the cold winter of 1870 that Blondie narrates her mother’s body’s deterioration from the womb: “her womb hardened in a sustained contraction . . . my mother went out one afternoon to study her

own misery . . . . She had never been so lonely. If it wasn't for me . . . murmuring prenatal dialogue, Mum herself might have turned to dust in the sinus-stinging dryness of that cruel winter of 1870" (33). Alice and Peter's voices are noticeably absent from the text as Blondie narrates a war update to the reader: the Canadian soldier, Hugh Sutherland, is killed by one of Riel's soldiers, Norbert Parisien, and then Thomas Scott, a Canadian soldier, kills Norbert Parisien (35,37). Soldier against soldier. One is fighting to protect land; the other is fighting to acquire land. They both envision the adventure playground as a battlefield. While Alice and Peter mimic the role of the soldier with the same obsessive energy that they put into defending their land title, they, like all soldiers, lose their voice and passion to the adventure story, and fall victim to the Empire's warring narrative. Wyile cautions against the "dangers of political absolutes" (745), and how blind loyalty to any leader easily transforms into "justified violence" (746).

Reinforcing this observation, Sweatman plays Alice's performative backward to the surveyor's report that foreshadows the obliteration of the Métis and Alice's artistic vision of her new land: "Scott's sneer had diminished the world she loved; his twisted smile as he struck Parisien with the axe had eviscerated her faith in human goodness" (38). Alice is "a virgin to such ardour. He was her first true hate" (37). Blondie narrates from her mother's womb: "Mum configured Thomas Scott as the source of evil and danger to her unborn, and with logic understandable only to a pregnant, slighted woman disguised as a soldier in a drafty fort, she wanted to kill Thomas Scott" (38). Alice "demonizes Scott as the embodiment of evil, the lone moral blemish on her prairie Eden" (Wyile 744). Scott becomes a prisoner of the Métis resistance, where Alice is a guard. Imprisoned, he is separated from the Empire's warring narrative, allowing Sweatman to examine the soldier up close. By himself, Scott is "afraid of nearly everything, but mostly he was afraid of courage, so he called everybody a coward and became addicted to alcohol and rage" (37). Similar to the Chief Justice before him, Thomas Scott "hated Louis Riel like he'd hate a successful and neglectful father. Métis, Catholic, sober, solitary, authoritative, worthy of a frightened man's hatred" (37). If the warring narrative is short-circuited, the soldier is exposed as just a frightened man full of hate, a coward. Thus, it is only through the reiteration of the Empire's story that the soldier and courage come into being at all.

Sweatman continues to play with the Empire's idea of a soldier, and Alice internalizes his fear, hatred and rage, and acts it out back at the fort. As dysentery infects Thomas Scott, it is Alice's job to escort him to the outhouse: "she dreamed she would gouge out his liver. She prayed that he would expel every organ in his rangy body—intestines, gut, heart, and eyeballs— through the vacuum of his filthy sphincter" (39). She prays that God would take "not only his excrement but the whole man. Lord, take him inside out through his vile bum" (39). Riel's provisional government finds Scott guilty of treason and sentences him to death by firing squad. Alice insists that she be one of his executioners, and plays the part of the glorified soldier, envisioning this act as an opportunity to rid the world of this hateful man and win her and Blondie "greater liberty than either had imagined" (40). Initially, Alice and Blondie, soldier and soldier-baby, role-play as if they have power: "We sat, she and I, and watched the condemned man. We watched him without pity. We were very strong" (40). Sweatman pushes the Empire's idea of power so far that its fear, rage, and hatred reproduce the apparently powerful but heartless soldier.

As Alice pulls the trigger, Sweatman brings the adventure story to another "full stop." Acting out in hatred and rage does not win Alice liberty or glory. Instead, she feels only immediate despair: Alice's "heart had run away" (41). Blondie curls up inside Alice's womb as if somehow feeling responsible for Alice's acting out: "And I curled comatose, as if I had abandoned her" (41). Alice's body slips into an ellipsis that exudes such an exaggerated energy that it draws Alice's body within and without itself and pulls the reader into the caverns of Alice's soul. The reader experiences Alice's and Blondie's despair, hears the moans of Thomas Scott's agony, and feels Alice's soul connect with Scott's soul in a space beyond the Empire's jurisdiction: he carried "within himself the song of all voices, an unfathomable chorus of human voices, beyond justice, beyond blame" (42). Alice readily admits to the reader that she "hadn't known that" (42), takes her cue from her "newly won compassion," and looks out "with gentle eyes . . . on the catastrophe of human nature" (42). In a moment of solitude, she remembers simultaneously her liturgy, "'I have killed a man'" (42) and the fallen soldier: "The limestone of the walls of the fort was made of pressed bones . . . . An entire wall of bones . . . remembered in stone. How beautiful" (42). Blondie takes her "cue" and shifts in her

“dark cradle” (42). Sweatman pushes the Empire’s idea of power until it transforms into its opposite, a compassionate discourse.

Sweatman and her characters perform a new social meaning of power that is beyond textual boundaries. It no longer acknowledges the discursive authority of the Empire’s warring narrative, nor does it recognize the hatred and rage of its soldier, but the soldier on the battlefield may be disoriented by this shift in script, but his mandate is still to avenge Scott’s execution. Sweatman had previously predicted this eventual altercation between Alice and the soldier, and insists that it be played out. Alice sloughs off her uniform to escape punishment, but some drunken soldiers mistakenly accuse Peter of killing Scott: “‘Lynch the Bastard!’” (59). Peter escapes, but Alice is dragged back into the adventure story, out of disguise, as a soldier pins her to the ground. The pressure of the soldier’s weight on her body “made a funnel for rainwater from Mum’s hat brim into my ear, and I began a howl that inspired my mother to sing, ‘Come, let us to the Lord our God with contrite hearts return’” (60). Although Alice seldom spoke in one dialect, “when she was scared the Scot in her came out” (60). Alice “stood up, holding her song like a gun,” and immediately the soldiers picked “themselves out of the mud,” and filed by her, “You’d expect them to drop a penny in her hat” (60). Hearing that song re-orientates the soldiers back into their roles, and, for the moment, Alice plays the role of the Empire and saves herself, showing the reader that even a woman can play that part.

Sweatman has metaphorically stripped the soldier of his uniform and gun and silenced the warring narrative, if only for a moment, leaving him disoriented and paying allegiance to Alice instead of the Empire. Alice later mentors this shifting performative of “Freedom through contradiction” within her Histrionic school (281): “It was Alice’s heyday. She was teaching in all her thirteen languages. At sixty, she looked ageless, with a muscled face, lithe as a gymnast” (135). However, her rebellious style of teaching does not go unnoticed by the school’s superintendent, Mrs. Smith, and when she monitors Alice’s classroom, Alice’s students tumble “into action . . . They worked like patriots preparing for a rebellion . . . because that’s what they were” (251). Acting out the 1837 rebellion, some of the students, “clutched their stomachs, moaned and fell over unconscious and woke up and moaned and fell over again” muttering “‘I’m hungry, I’m

so hungry,’” while other students leapt out from behind their chairs, yelling if they want food, they must “‘Pay up!’” (251).

Switching from rebels to rich landowners, Alice’s students shout out sentiments, such as “‘Certainly! After we kill the rebels’” and “‘PROTECT THE RICH!’” (252). Some students stop, while others rush “to the climax, when they got to have a shootout and die in flames” (253). At this point, Mrs. Smith walks “onstage like the Industrial Revolution,” demanding the year of this revolution (253). Some of the students yell out 1837, while others shout 1914, suggesting that the date is not significant as all rebellions against the Empire end in the same way. Mrs. Smith fires Alice, and demands that the children “‘sing a goodbye song to Mrs. McCormack’” as their “‘duty to the king!’” (253). They sing “‘England, My England,’” (254), standing in front of the largest “hand-drawn map of the world” and the “biggest, reddest, bluest Union Jack on the face of the earth” (249). Alice’s rebellion against the Empire’s idea of conformity appears to be derailed as the children’s freedom is funneled back into obedience, but Blondie notes that Alice’s students were singing “with all their ironic hearts and a trace of an accent” (254). Alice’s mentorship of freedom through contradiction cannot be contained by a historical text, a classroom, or a song of allegiance because its social meaning stretches beyond the restraints of the adventure story in the hearts of her students.

Throughout Alice’s role-playing, Sweatman through Blondie has created and maintained Alice as an authority of the word that goes beyond the Empire’s idea of intimacy, as power, and its reinforcing Adam and Eve story, suggesting that Alice’s life is already a repeat performative. She has already experienced and analyzed the adventure story, and the history of that alternate script is already in Alice’s vocabulary, but she refuses to construct an assembled sentence. Blondie says, “MY MOTHER WORSHIPPED WORDS, Spoken, written, words of love, fibs, prayers, sung or shouted—she respected them all—jokes . . . . She learned the local name for every growing thing on her new property. She had an ear for foreign words” (23). Utilizing her authority of the word and her mastery of performance strategies, Alice mentors her own idea of freedom, not only in classroom, but on the stage. Sweatman continues to accommodate Alice’s evolving performative by not only creating a space for Alice’s

School of Histrionic Drama on the adventure playground, but also by re-claiming seven former immigrant students, who are already trained in Alice's art of contradiction.

Since the original mandate of Alice's Histrionic school was to "produce histrionic history" (277), Alice challenges her students to perform a play that examines the end product of imperialism, "the capitalists' domicile up close" (255). On the night of their performance, the theatre is packed because the audience thinks that they are performing *Ben Hur*, just another "innocent mistake" on the tickets (280). Instead, Blondie is "Woodrow Wilson," Eli plays a "German General," and another actor plays this "fellow Hitler" (280). Alice's intention is to peacefully refute imperialism and fascism on the stage with placards, but the actors "just got lost inside that play" and "transformed the world into a battlefield" (280), resulting in both the stage and the audience erupting in mayhem. However, Helen's placards did make it on stage, and the audience did get to read "'600,000 YOUNG MEN!' 'CANADA SACRIFICED HER YOUTH FOR NATIONHOOD!' 'THE BRITS THINK WE'RE SERVANTS!' and 'PEACE THROUGH FEAR!'" (282). Although Blondie thinks that this is her "MOTHER'S LAST and greatest" performance, it is also her "least popular production" (279), as it is a victim of bad timing. It is performed on November 10, and World War I ended the next day. While the words of rebellion did make it onto the stage and Alice's staged world as a battlefield did expose the mandate of the Empire's warring narrative that "peace through fear" is no different than German fascism, this performance is cut short by the arrival of the police.

Although Alice and her fellow actors spend a night in jail for performing anarchy, their punishment is revoked by Sweatman as they are, ironically, sprung, so to speak, by Richard, who is both Blondie's daughter Helen's fiancé and the prototype soldier of the Empire. Right on cue, Richard, dressed in his naval uniform, marches down the stone corridor of the jail, along with the "magistrate, who had stormed Alice's Histrionic production," and his police officers: "Eight pair of boots in sync and the jingle of keys" (283). The defenders of the Empire bear witness to Richard's power as Richard plays his part with the "air of a man who did not believe in the power of confession" (283). He takes "Helen's arm and led us all away, folk following the golden egg" (284). Richard believes that he is acting for the Empire, leading the actors back into obedience, when



really he is acting for Alice, freeing Alice and her actors to conclude the final scene of Alice's play, a scene in which they were supposed to examine the capitalist mansion up close, but for now, a capitalist will do: Richard says, "We've come to let you out" (283). All Alice can say is "'Well, damned I'll be'" (283). In the end, Alice's play does turn out to be her last and greatest play as she reduces Richard's grand gesture of power to "somebody's idea of a good time" (303). Alice's credibility as a master manipulator of the word, theological and otherwise, as an actor capable of playing many roles, and as an authority on performative strategies, such as hyperbole and histrionics, has been unintentionally sanctioned and released back into the adventure story by Richard, the magistrate, and the police. So it is really Richard, the head of the capitalist mansion, the end product of the Empire's good white seed, wearing the soldier's uniform and the stylish suit, who bungles his own story and makes it possible for Alice's and Blondie's adventures to continue and gain momentum.

Sweatman, through Blondie and Alice, tracks the Empire's adventure story, usurping the vulnerable gaps within the Empire's discourse and transforming them into their opposites. For example, Isaiah's words, as truth, are proven to be a misappropriation; the organizing factor of the Empire's discourse, its heterosexual imperative, is built upon homoerotic fear; the soldier, as protector and civilizer, is exposed as a coward and bungler. Sweatman pushes the Empire's warring narrative to the point that Alice's Ben Hur/Adolf Hitler play at the Walker Theater exposes the Empire's mandate, itself, as no different from German fascism and Richard's capitalism. While Phillips' centers his theorizing on the Empire and its imagined and reinforced adventure story, as a reiterated regulatory network that sustains the Empire, and Butler argues that the adventurer's experience is always only a gendered performative within that process, Sweatman exaggerates the Empire's discursive authority to the point that it becomes at once imperialism, fascism, and capitalism, but then she simplifies that totality to the gender performative, and finally to Richard, a bungling soldier of the Empire.

At the same time as Sweatman is having fun with the Empire's regulatory network, Alice sidewinds her way through the Empire's adventure story. She observes and plays with both the male and female gender performatives in search of agency, but finds that the little freedom she gains through Butler's idea of gender variation is realized

at the expense of her voice and passion. In the end, Alice rejects gender boundaries and performs a bodily discourse that turns, so far, on a sneeze and a kiss, and evolves out of dramatic moments of orgasmic passion and compassion. She plays as a performative contradiction under her motto: ““Push Histrionics and How!”” (279). Through Alice’s eyes, readers have seen glimpses of her artistic vision of the land that she loves and can imagine trees reconfigured into words on a page. They have experienced passionate desire, pleasure, diffidence, empathy, despair, and compassion. They have intuitively responded to counterclockwise language, waves, and glances. They have laughed along with Sweatman’s women characters as they upstage the Empire’s soldier within the adventure playground and have been transported into the caverns of Alice’s soul. They have participated in Alice’s anarchy, as a socially and politically responsible act of agency on the battlefield and within Alice’s Histrionic school and theater. Alice’s anarchy has been sanctioned by all the voices of humanity harbored within Alice’s and Thomas Scott’s souls, a space that is beyond the Empire’s jurisdiction, and by Richard within the adventure story. While readers are privy to Alice’s performance and co-conspirators in Sweatman’s coup, many of them, as did Alice’s audience, will revert back to Butler’s way of thinking that this ‘I’ cannot be sustained outside the theater or text. They will inadvertently reinforce the regulatory network of the Empire, and settle for another post-war period of peace, believing the Empire’s promise of no more war. A promise, Sweatman, Alice, Blondie, a few immigrant actors, and a few observant readers know is “Bullshit!” (270).

Chapter 2: Blondie . . . I am back . . . what now?

*I don’t dream at night, I dream all day; I dream for a living.*

--Steven Spielberg

Although Alice and Blondie, as actor and narrator, whirl through the adventure story like a funnel cloud, imitating, exaggerating, and critiquing the Empire's gender performative to its almost extinction, their sidewinding performances also play with the reader's imagination, stirring a desire for passion. Nudging the reader into her transformed erotic and emotional, political and anarchical mimicry of an old story, Sweatman pushes banishment and deliberate erasure into creative license. Alice is in her 'hey day,' at once manipulating the adventure story in jest, and yet performing a rival bodily discourse within the Empire's own adventure playground, in its schools, and on its stage. Her motto, 'Push Histrionics and How,' her love of words, her lack of pretentiousness disguised beneath good Scottish roots, her theological expertise, and her colonial disregard are meant to seduce the reader into imagining a discourse of compassion and passion.

Blondie has already introduced herself in the prologue of the novel. Similar to Isaiah's idea of intimacy, Blondie's idea of intimacy is given an introductory space of authority, outside the novel, and yet her prologue is also the opening page of the novel. At 109 years of age, Blondie is celebrating her conception, birth, life, and death as a sensual force from a "benign" state "laid out beside [her] vegetable garden" (1). She is speaking directly to her reader, "you see me" (1). Obviously, Blondie has not been banished from her garden for being disobedient because she is still on 'their' property, and she is narrating her story from that "lucid perspective" (1). Neither Blondie's aging body nor her garden is perfect, but they share a fluidity that is outside the understanding of the Empire's adventure story: "You wouldn't think a garden could sense the age of its gardener, but now everything grows stunted, even the carrots, spindly as a baby's finger" (1). At the same time, Blondie's sensual body is obviously within her garden, "I am not a big-chested woman . . . . My arms sag and my armpits have jowls" (2), but her passion cannot be stifled by her aging body, being fed, instead, by both her imagination and a universal force: "I was play-acting, pretending I was young. To my delight, I felt a flush of sexual desire, tender as rain" (2), and "Beside me on the grass" is "a green plastic watering can, leaking its rainwater into my ear" (1). Blondie's passion, although conceived and birthed on the adventure playground, cannot be contained within its linear

and finite boundaries: “And that devil’s kiss, my birthmark, brown as an acorn, at the cusp of rib and breast. It is certainly provocative in its own way. And if you stretch the word a million miles, sexy” (2). Nor does her passion end with death: “And today, which happens to be a Tuesday, I am dead as a stick” (2). Blondie’s adventure, as a benign and unlimited force of passion, is a shared performative, a shared fluidity, between her imagination, her sensuous body, her garden, the reader, and an ‘unnamed’ force that can neither be contained nor controlled by the adventure story or this text.

Sweatman accommodates Blondie’s sensuality in a space without name and time, between the realm of the living and the dead, an ellipsis which is outside the adventure playground, yet at the same time grounds Blondie in her own garden. Blondie narrates her story from this space, but she is careful to mark it with her physical presence, her name, age, birth date, and the date of her death: “I am 109 years of age, since the twelfth of this month. Born on a hot day in 1870. I would have to admit, I am ancient” (2). Sweatman’s narrative not only plays within and without the adventure story, but also shifts history backward and forward. Playing history backward, Blondie has already diminished Isaiah’s words and the adventure story. All that is left of the adventure playground are ruins: “there was a fence of willow posts and chicken wire but it fell down thirty-five years ago” (1). The internalized rage of the soldier is also gone: there is “no dog on chains, no malice in the shade, no fear and no ache in your veins” (1). At the same time, Sweatman exaggerates and elongates this ellipsis, accommodating not only a celebration of Blondie’s passion, but also the transformation of endings into new beginnings as Blondie transforms her body, a dead stick in an old story, into her origin, and her life begins again: Part 1, Chapter 1: “THESE ARE MY BEGINNINGS” (5). Just like Isaiah, Blondie is a dead narrator, but unlike Isaiah, Blondie’s imagination, her sensual body, and her passionate spirit continue to evolve even after her death. Arguably, Sweatman acknowledges the citational authority of Isaiah’s idea of ‘intimacy,’ by giving it a prestigious introductory space in the opening pages of the novel, but then deflates his authority in Blondie’s prologue, by refusing to repeat and reiterate Isaiah’s idea of intimacy as the only truth (303).

Blondie’s beginnings are acted out in an electrically charged, titillating sexual scene between Alice and Peter early in the novel. Electric surges of lightning act as the

catalyst in their love-making: “The next stroke made their hair stand on end, my father’s hair longer and scruffier than my mother’s theatrical boy’s bob. Twenty-five thousand volts” (6). While Peter “fought for an end to his need, pounding the walls of his beloved, seeking an end,” Alice sees “the leader stroke of lightning, a brilliant ionized path stark white against the deep purple sky” (6). Sweatman challenges anyone to imagine “themselves in [Peter’s] boots at that moment,” and is certain that they would “forgive him the indiscretion of the fiercest ejaculation by a white man in the brief history of Rupert’s Land . . . my mother was receptive, the voltage and the heat fired the seed,” knocking her “unconscious” (6-7). While the Empire is oblivious to such passion, Sweatman stretches Peter and Alice’s love-making beyond the Empire’s heterosexual imperative into a dramatic moment of pure pleasure and reproducing passion, ecstasy. She seduces her reader into *ménage à trois* of desiring that moment for themselves.

Sweatman juxtaposes the frenzy of electrical potential created in the thunder cloud against the bodily potential to create, and Blondie obliges by narrating her own conception. When Alice “looked above [Peter’s] pounding shoulder and saw the lurid purple of the thunderhead ink the half-moon, cover it . . . she knew, she knew” (6). Alice and Blondie know that “the voltage and the heat” that “fired” or fertilized Alice’s “seed,” did not come from a white man; instead, it comes from a source that precedes the Empire’s discursive. Blondie says, “I’d been tipped into the world, off a thundercloud like a huge tarnished tray, tipped like caviar into my mother’s womb. And scorched there, the seed of a jack pine. The catalyst, a stroke of lightning” (7). Sweatman usurps lightning, a scientifically proven construct accepted by the Empire as a truth, to enable Blondie’s return and quash the Empire’s ability to grant soul. Alice and Peter wake “up fourteen hours later, still coupled . . . but happy” (7); Isaiah’s “Cow and calf” analogy has “vanished” (7). Sweatman deliberately elongates the ellipsis following Alice’s orgasm and Blondie’s conception to reiterate the fact that Alice, Peter, and Blondie have conspired against the Empire and escaped punishment.

Blondie not only conceives herself as passion, but also re-choreographs female sensuality as the missing part of womanhood that has been deliberately erased from the adventure story. She exaggerates Alice and Peter’s orgasm to such a myth-making and scientific performative that their bodies blur the edges of the fixed dichotomies of

mind/body, flesh/spirit, carnal/divine, male/female: “She’d thought he’d come. Their catechism had reached that stage of exchange where one becomes another, pulse and tide for tide and pulse. Her own juice she mistook for his” (6). Within this moment of solitude, Alice’s body is free of the gendered performative, free to experience the pure pleasure of her own body: “She was safely playing on the shores of pleasure” (6). Sweatman suspends space and time, and while the reader is intrigued and the Empire is still oblivious to her adventure, Blondie re-choreographs Alice’s orgasm and stretches the meaning of freedom beyond the recognizable definition of passion within the Empire’s discursive. She aligns pleasure, passion, and play alongside compassion in the folksy tune that is sung by all the voices of humanity outside the adventure story, while at the same time, she grounds the female body to the adventure playground in the Manitoba gumbo.

By re-choreographing passion and stretching its meaning beyond the social construction of the adventure story, Sweatman, still, within this full stop moment of passion, assures her readers that they have probably already experienced this moment, when they, too, were reproducing forces of passion. Blondie, in turn, reinforces this ‘truth’ by challenging her readers not only to remember, mark, and celebrate her arrival, but also to re-experience that “Hunger from a long fast, constant temptation and the arousal, perhaps you know of it, that comes from watching a lover’s freedom or solitude, the aphrodisiac of the lover’s face averted, the part that leaves you out” (6). Sweatman and Blondie lure the readers into this orgasmic moment of desire and passion, which is no longer just blurring gender binaries, but is beyond gender in a world as performance. It is a moment of new beginnings, within which Alice experiences her body as a force of creation, her own Big Bang that is not restricted to procreation.

Although the Empire continues to recognize the female body as a vessel that produces soldier-babies, Sweatman has already short-circuited its regulatory process and transformed the Empire’s seed, via “the fiercest ejaculation by a white man,” into Blondie’s origin (7). Sweatman marks both Blondie’s conception as a historically specific event on the adventure playground, and notes for historical purposes the exact moment when the Empire’s seed is rendered impotent: “It was two o’clock on the first afternoon of my life” (7). That moment spins Blondie’s embryo into action as she

declares her “character right off the bat” (23), and collaborates with her mother “in the form of exhausting dreams” (24). Blondie’s “presence” makes her mother “feel beautiful, passionate and alive. My mother’s laughter, those nine months, came from the place where happiness and nearly intolerable ache live together” (24). Blondie has re-entered the adventure story, not as a soldier-baby of the Empire, but as a willful, reproducing force of passion.

Sweatman may have tricked the Empire into recording Blondie’s return as a historically specific event, but the Canadians have a trick of their own. Blondie’s urgency to be born is juxtaposed against the rising tension between the Canadians and the young Red River upstarts. As Blondie begins her slide down the birth canal, a very real event in Marie’s grotto on their shared property, and Alice wails her “birth song, the awful tearing of life into life. Mum squatting, even in hysteria, a zealous anticolonialist, a pure squatter” (47), the “great machinery of Canadian territorial claims” births the province of Manitoba (48). At the same moment that Alice’s water breaks and Blondie pushes her way into the adventure story, Alice and Peter’s fragile land claim is being questioned. Before Blondie is born, her life, liberty, and happiness are already in jeopardy.

Blondie’s slide into the adventure story gets messy, but Sweatman accommodates Blondie’s bewildering transition and stretches the ellipsis following her birth to allow Blondie time to interpret her new world: “They washed me by the light of the fire, for in the strange ways of birth, seven hours had passed like a divine ellipsis” (50). Blondie’s character is already apparent before her birth as the reader is privy to her prenatal monologue, but in her first moments of life, she becomes aware of herself as a sensual being. Before Blondie utters a word or thinks a human thought, she hears the sound of laughter, “at the first ass-backwards sight of me, I made people laugh” (50). She is a jokester first: “I WAS BREACH. Born so swollen, bum first, the first sight of me a bowel movement that Mum thought I was a boy and Dad cheered, ‘He’s well-hung!’” (49-50). Only then does Alice recognize Blondie as a girl, “A daughter” (50). Sweatman usurps the Empire’s power to name: “My parents never really named me. The dark newborn’s hair had given way to a white cloud of curls floating about my head. So they called me Blondie, a purely descriptive designation, really not a name at all” (53). The only certainty is that Blondie is a sensual female body, originating simultaneously from

all the voices of humanity and a guttural happiness deep within her mother's body with a time and date of birth, squatting like her parents on a farm near St. Norbert, Manitoba.

Blondie's ass-backward entrance into the adventure story momentarily short-circuits the Empire's discourse, and tricks it into welcoming her back. Peter and Alice run "their warm, roughened hands all over my new body . . . laughing over my blatant genius" (50). While the Empire's authority is muffled by their laughter and the reader is paying attention, Blondie's social address as a girl of the Empire is lost. Blondie does what some critics deem impossible. Butler argues that "Gender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, ones that are almost always related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond . . . the initiatory performative, 'It's a girl!' anticipates the eventual arrival of the sanction, 'I pronounce you man and wife'" ("Critically Queer" 157). She contends that "it's a girl" is a "compulsory" performative, one "which none of us choose, but which each of us is forced to negotiate" (BTM 237). However, Blondie's body is first recognized by Alice, and Blondie is socialized into her world of performance as a jokester first, and as a sexed body second. Thus, her sexed body as a 'girl' avoids the "gender imperative" that reads "as a command," and Blondie escapes the insubordination that this command reproduces (BTM 237). Sweatman at once reduces a truth of the Empire to a laughable assumption and transforms the citation "it's a girl" from a forced insubordination into a celebratory historical event.

Sweatman flags Blondie's return as, at once, the origin of womanhood and the birth of the individual. It is both a collective social meaning of power and an individual act of courage. Blondie's newborn body, her "ivory" spooned sternum, is tattooed at the cusp where her rib and breast bone meet, with a "bright red" birthmark (51). She is the "perfect" "daughter" (50), Alice announces, but then notices that "the ghost of Thomas Scott has left his mark" (51-52). At first glance, Alice thinks of this "devil's kiss" as a curse and a constant reminder of her guilt, but later it fades "to ochre, then dun" and becomes as "beautiful as pain becomes beautiful when it's past" (51), a badge of courage. It signifies the conception and birth of a rival bodily discourse, which turns on a common origin of compassion and passion rather than rage and hatred. For Alice and her descendants, it is a discourse that challenges but does not banish either the Empire's



discourse or Isaiah's idea of intimacy from the adventure story: "My mother had a spacious soul, and she accommodated the ulcer of guilt from Thomas Scott's death sentence. Thomas Scott lived with us, so to speak, in the dark corners, but we still lit the lamps, remained loyal to day's light and love's warmth. We let him stay on, a deranged boarder. We owed him that" (55). Resisting the erasure of Scott's story, Sweatman, ever the jokester, plays the devil's advocate, usurps the power of Scott's hand, the hand that previously held a gun in defense of the Empire, and uses it to mark future generations of women with the knowledge of an alternative script of compassion and passion. At the same time, she includes Scott's ruins in the origin of her story. As Wyile suggests, "To forget Thomas Scott" is to invite the return of "justified violence" (746). Alice would say later to Helen when she laments about not receiving a birthmark, "'Never forget, darling, what's right is also wrong. Don't let that scoundrel's death be in vain'" (273). Once again, Alice's and now Blondie's life turns on a kiss, the devil's kiss, as Sweatman uses the hand of the Empire's own soldier to sanction and reiterate the return of womanhood.

Blondie spends her early years balancing the impossible with the possible, as she both fears the potency of her passion and yet wants to experience that passion. Always the jokester, she explores both scenarios. Blondie tries to seduce Eli. Eli unbuttons his jacket, shirt, and pants, and lets them fall to the floor: "His chest was thick, covered with hair; it looked like a piece of granite, moon blue with points of pink like feldspar, a chunk of flesh" (100). Blondie "was dry and had never known the walls of myself before and hadn't thought about my interior skin before this moment . . . . The pain was certainly manageable, nothing more than a sliver or pain we might impose to heal ourselves, belonging to the flesh, not inflicted" (101-102). As Blondie pulls Eli closer, making "him move in that hungry wall he'd unearthed inside," Blondie tries to recreate Alice's moment of solitude, in which she rode on the shores of pure pleasure, ecstasy. However, Blondie's moment is ruined when Eli's body goes rigid and he pulls away, moaning "'I'm sorry'" (102). Their staged stolen moment is reduced to "an ugly, misshapen mistake twisted by guilt" (102). Although Blondie is "too hurt to cry" (102), Eli's acting out reduces her to "just an ugly little girl. He shamed me" (103). Blondie reacts by making Eli kiss her, and giving him such a "fierce electric shock" that when she pulls away her "nightgown lit up with static" (103). Like the adventurers before him who

feared a lad (Alice) who could exude such passion, Eli, playing Blondie's Adam within the Empire's adventure story, appears to be rendered impotent by Blondie's passion. Since ecstasy has been banned from the Empire's Eden in favour of what Sweatman refers to as "'small, barely noticeable'" climaxes ("The future of Prairie Lit" D 13), the Empire sabotages its own heterosexual imperative by rendering passion unknowable, a non-truth. This scene foreshadows a later one in which Richard, the prototype of the Empire, is also rendered impotent within his own bedroom.

After Blondie's bungled sex scene with Eli, her body comes to a full stop, paralyzed with guilt and shame, mimicking for her readers what happens within the gender performative when men or women act out their passion. Pretending to punish herself, Blondie takes a self-imposed hiatus from both her life and the text, deducing that a woman with such power had to be cautious: "I had learned a terrible lesson . . . . Everything I looked at shrank away into nothing, like Eli's desirable egg . . . . Whatever I looked at disappeared: Marie, the Métis, Peter's freedom and now Eli" (108). Blondie becomes her own judge, sentences herself to fifteen years of solitude, and focuses her "potent attention only on what was truly irrelevant" (108): "Latin," History, "Greek," "Luther, Wesley, Augustine," British history, famous authors such as "Chaucer" and "Boethius" (108-109). Denying her passion, she only studies "Intelligence. By this means, I would protect all that I loved. By learning. Through an exotic translation from touch to intellect, from knowledge to book-fed ignorance" (109). But Blondie's body becomes increasingly brittle. Her "static electricity" grows "so acute" that she could "touch no one . . . for fear of an electric shock of sufficient magnitude to inadvertently erase their memories" (125). While acting this "living hell" at the expense of her imagination and sensual body, Blondie tires of that role (125). On the last day of her self-banishment, with René Descartes' book in hand and after "Learning the principles of radical doubt," Blondie looks out the window "into the chaos of real life" and deliberately misinterprets Descartes' "lessons" (126): "I was thus occupied with a reunion with my flesh" (128). While Butler contends that the Empire does not recognize individual acts of courage, Blondie does. She springs herself from her self-imposed hiatus.

Blondie's uncertainty as to how to transform the impossible into the possible seems to be remedied by Descartes' principle of "radical doubt" (126). She tests Descartes' theory on Eli, but instead of doubting the body's existence, she uses it to doubt Descartes' own mind/body dualism. Blondie holds her "hand against the light and looked through the skin to the red blood inside . . . and then [she] looked between [her] fingers at the dazzle of sun and Eli, still there, persistently fleshed" (126). She mimics Descartes' and Butler's thinking process, in which they grapple with the obvious: "the hand that writes the doubt and the hand that is doubted--is it mine?" (Butler, "How Can I Deny" 271).

Rejecting this circular argument of entrapment, Blondie walks toward Eli "like a liberator" (126). After embracing him, she goes to the river, strips naked, and swims: "With each stroke, the scales were falling from my body. Water was a palm or a tongue or a paw . . . my rash had been cured and my skin purified by its gentle abrasion" (128). Arguably, Blondie pushes a full stop moment of sensory deprivation to such an extreme that it transforms into its opposite: "Somehow my limbs were still round and muscled despite the years of vegetative reading. My thighs were ample and strong, and my belly was firm with just enough fat on it; as round and white as the petals of anemone were my breasts, and the bright devil's kiss my sole jewellery" (128). She now jokingly pays homage to colonial blindness: "Irrelevance. Savior of all that would remain secret, of my heart. An education in irrelevant information. So my home and loved ones (yes, those departed in error, made crazy by the foreign god of guilt) may survive in blindness, in colonial disregard may we thrive" (109). Sweatman usurps Descartes' and Butler's mind-body split from the ruins of the Empire's story, magnifies them under Blondie's scrutinizing 'eye,' and then discards them as colonial and gender blindness. She deflates the potency of the Empire's discourse, by overlaying the first adventure story, the Adam and Eve story, and all its derivatives, with Blondie's thinking sensuous female body.

While Blondie's body, disguised as a "soul misunderstood," gains momentum as a force to be reckoned with on the adventure playground, Sweatman continues to accommodate Blondie's performative by stealing moments of solitude from the text (76-77). Sweatman usurps the "magic" that surrounds Marie's abandoned grotto on 'their' property (76), as it is from Marie's ruins that Blondie learns "to enjoy the gift of solitude"

(77): “It was connected to our house by a nearly invisible path, and no one guessed my secret grotto. I was like a philanderer with an apartment” (76-77). Blondie longs to teach Eli everything she knows about solitude and passion: “I was an empire for him to discover . . . I’d teach him everything I knew, the whole package: politics and a real understanding of nature” (79). Since the trail to Marie’s grotto is nearly invisible, it has not been tainted by colonialism. Blondie was born and married there (167), and it was Eli and Blondie’s first home (171). Marie knows Blondie’s story and her grotto materializes that previously unknown space where women have been nurturing their passion in secrecy. Thus, to restrict Marie to only a ghostly presence that signifies a post-colonial unease, as Wyile suggests (743), is to trivialize her role as a protector of passion, its soldier, and leave passion vulnerable to erasure, once again.

Just as Blondie knows that she is an unfolding empire of passion, she also realizes that the male adventurer is studying her behaviour and he is not ready, as yet, for a change in script: Blondie catches Clark, a Canadian soldier, spying on her and improvises: “If he’d smiled, I would have transformed him into a stag and sicked the dogs on him . . . It was a lovely moment, but I couldn’t hold the nymph pose a second longer” (128-129). For now, Blondie chooses to play the Empire’s idea of that perfect mix between passion and freedom. That night, Clark, Eli, and Blondie play cards all night: “Out of practice. Won me the confidence of the boys. I was the perfect mix: kind of a woman, but not very pretty; kind of a man, but she plays cards like she feels obliged to lose” (136). Blondie decides it is “a big gaffe to be passionate; significance itself was in bad taste” (137). She has some unfinished business to attend to.

Earlier, when Alice and the “bohunk” woman conspired against the Empire over a shared pee, it was evident that at some point, Alice, and now Blondie, would have to confront the Empire’s idea of a soldier. While Alice has been noticeably absent from the text since she had taken that unnecessary loan from the Chief Justice, she now springs into action (107). She rises to the role of family matriarch: “Alice adopted new roles so fully that she brought a history with her, and within minutes our family was led by Alice, had always been led by Alice” (145). Alice decides that Blondie is going to South Africa. She cuts Blondie’s hair, makes her a make-shift moustache, and says, ““This is your chance to grow up. You will become a woman by first becoming a man . . . I can

only say it worked for me’” (149): “Transvestitism had become a family tradition” (151). Although Alice appears “determined and decisive” (151), her eyes tear up when it is time to say goodbye. Clark and Roberts, soldier boys from Ontario, and Blondie put on their uniforms, and fight for Britain in the Boer war in South Africa.

Since Blondie has sloughed off the colonial blindness necessary to wear the Empire’s uniform, her experience as a soldier on the African landscape does not empower her any more than the shooting of Thomas Scott empowered Alice. Instead, it makes her homesick: “The mention of the river [Modder River]” makes her “heart ache” for the Red River that runs through McCormack land (154). Her surroundings are unfamiliar: “I didn’t know the name of anything around me” (154). She does not know her name: “‘Your name is Trooper McCormack.’ It was no help at all” (154). Blondie is temporarily ‘missing’ and Sweatman uses this moment to stage a repeat performance of Alice’s last and least popular production, only this time, it plays out on the battlefield. She casts Clark, a soldier of the Empire, as the main actor playing himself, while Blondie plays the ‘lost’ soldier. Blondie asks why they are here and Clark, acting with the obsessive energy of the Empire, replies that they are loyal to “Her Imperial Majesty” and that they are fighting for the British Empire, but Blondie is adamant that the Empire does not own her (155). Clark laughs “bitterly,” saying “‘It is the same here as at *home!*’” (155). Looking out at the battlefield, he shouts, “‘We are nothing! Without loyalty!’” and then he says “helplessly,” this “‘is my home . . . . Do you see who I am? I am this!’” (156). Clark returns to the battlefield, but his “last look” back is “one of humiliation” (156). While Blondie feels Clark’s struggling with his lost passion, she directs her reader’s loyalty away from the Empire to her body: “My flesh was a foreign weed twisted right out of the soil, withering. Because I was travelling against the current” (156). For the second time, Sweatman pushes Butler’s idea of gender variation into redundancy.

Back at headquarters, Sweatman stages a repeat performance. This time she casts Roberts in the leading role. Blondie asks him whether the British have a right to be in South Africa, and Roberts’ answer is similar to Clark’s in that he says that the British Empire owns South Africa. Roberts goes on to say that they paid six million pounds for South Africa to “defend their ignorant masses from slavery” (159). Seeing through

Roberts' altruistic attempt, Blondie 'eggs' him on, and asks is that all you paid for their diamond and gold mines? Roberts does not see anything wrong with using the "riches of an uncivilized country" (159). Blondie, still in soldier disguise, realizes the conundrum of Roberts' logic. He says that the West was bought for furs, lumber, and land, and look how the Indians have benefited. Swelling with pride and rhetoric, Roberts says that he, as a representative of the British Empire, grants "the enemy a soul" (161), just like the British Empire granted the Indian soul in Canada. His arrogance is further exaggerated as he takes center stage and speaks directly to the readers as if he is the Empire and admits that he envisions the world as a battlefield: "'That's what builds empires! That's what makes us welcome in these uncivilized places! Seed! They're crying for it'" (161). If British seed builds Empires and if Sweatman has rendered it impotent within the first pages of the novel, then Roberts' performance renders the Empire impotent on its own world stage, the battlefield. The Empire's own soldier is a vulnerable gap within its regulatory network.

Sweatman deflates Roberts' 'acting out' in the Empire's name to a joke, and then plays that history backward, juxtaposing Roberts' arrogance against Clark's dead dismembered body, as a casualty of war, in the ellipsis following his death. Blondie narrates that scene:

[Clark's] eyes were open, as if his brain had exploded through some kind of impact that forced the eyes out, hemorrhaging, so they were layered in a white, nictating film, with blood seeping from under the lids. His nose was small and blunt, as it hadn't looked in life . . . I tried to lift his shoulder, but his arm had come away beneath the shoulder blade. (162)

Like Alice before her at the execution of Thomas Scott, Blondie feels the weight of humanity, and apologizes to Clark: "I am so sorry" (162). Later in the graveyard, Blondie feels the spirits of the dead as they drift off as if in a cloud, "the colours were bright, brilliant, the grassy air prickly and green. I began to feel myself, the faint papery sound of my hands when I touched them together, the fine pores of my skin. In the grass beside me was one small blue flower that had escaped being trampled. It was the bluest thing I'd ever seen" (163). On the Empire's stage, the battlefield, Blondie, and the reader, witness both the rise and fall of the Empire and its ruins. The ghosts of the dead

soldiers in the graveyard conjure feelings of compassion within Blondie, not as a force on a world stage, but as a force within her own bones that leads her home: “I was never lost, because I could feel in my bones the direction that would eventually lead me home” (157). Communing with the dead soldiers makes Blondie feel more alive and driven, reaffirming Sweatman’s statement from her interview with Don Mills: “If I can write about being dead, I’m not that dead” (17). For a moment, Blondie is that small blue flower that escapes trampling.

Although the reader witnesses the rise and fall of the British Empire on a world stage, feels the weight of humanity within a shared moment of solitude in the graveyard, and hears Blondie’s apology. Sweatman restarts the adventure story and Blondie’s world of performance is, once again, a battlefield. The Boer War will not be the last rich man’s war as the static cycle of war is destined to repeat again. It was “A Cavalry war. It belonged to men who cut the pages of their books with silver letter openers . . . . Strangers were unsympathetic” even though she “was a man in uniform” (164), but perhaps they thought she “had been cauterized by wealth” (165). It is no longer “any fun being a man” (164). As Blondie makes her way home to her farm near St. Norbert, Manitoba, she starts crying and becomes a “vivid electrical conductor,” shucking off her “knapsack” and her “clothes” (165). She peels back the layers of her disguise and arrives at her farm “empty-handed” and “bare-assed” (165). Blondie is ready to start again, embrace her sensuality, and re-create that moment of passion, in which, she, like Alice, plays safely on the shores of pleasure. Blondie realizes, mimicking her mother’s performance, that in as much as there is power in dressing-up, there is also power in taking off the disguise.

Out of her disguise, Blondie desires that rejuvenating moment within her mother’s love-making that she had tried to replicate before with Eli. Nearing home, Blondie pauses at the T in the road. She stands “naked” under the looming god-like thunderhead, “with its cold lip pressed above the gate,” and the “music” of Eli’s “mouth organ” playing a “corny, folksy tune” serenades her home (165). Sometimes the thunder drowns out his playing, but Eli persists as “bold as a kid stealing from a garden, hesitant, then running hard” until Blondie stands before this “patient, tranquil man” (166). With the wind blowing her hair and a light rain cooling her naked skin, Blondie emits “a sibilant

glow” (166). Eli looks up to the sky with his face drowning in pleasure: Blondie says, ““Hey Zeus”” (166). In a moment choreographed and fired by Blondie and the universe, Eli comes toward her: “The storm crashed through, falling in on us like a forest burning, a mine caving in, and there was the strong scent of sea. The rain fell in torrents, Poseidon’s backhand slap, ripping the clothes from Eli’s back and laying us in the mud” (166). Blondie teaches Eli everything about her empire, the whole package: “I found I could talk while I kissed, and I poured everything into him and he into me” (166). As Della Pollock suggests, the body acts through itself, as agency, and Sweatman transforms the word empire from its textual constraints into Blondie, as an empire unfolding.

As with Peter and Alice, lightning is the catalyst of creation for Eli and Blondie, but with a difference. The lightning transforms into its new role as Chief Justice of the universe, and creates another line of authority dictated by passion. It designates Eli and Blondie as its guardian and mentor, and permanently stipples them to their garden: “The lightening struck the ground beside us as I kissed Eli’s chest . . . like a shotgun in his ear; it shattered his eardrum and ran through his loving throat and through him a seed to the calyx of iris and stippled us, a permanent engraving upon the land where we would grow our gardens” (166-167). As the lightning surges through Eli, it shorts-circuits his white capitalist seed and transforms it into a potent energy that comes from a shared universal origin. This reconfiguration of energy is so powerful that Blondie’s body is momentarily transformed outside of itself: “the intolerable delight placed me beside myself and I was looking at the mud, where a tiny blossom of blue-eyed grass stood up in the rain. And then . . . we both passed out” (167). Sweatman stretches the metaphors of choreography and reproduction to anarchy. In another larger-than-life dramatic moment, she bypasses the Empire’s controlling discourse and permanently links Blondie to her garden. Blondie’s body is, at once, a creating force of passion and a citation of that passion, a ‘kind’ of empire with a ‘kind’ of a flag and a ‘kind’ of a soldier: a transitive blade of grass stands up in the mud. Her daughter, Helen, is conceived.

Sweatman and Blondie have co-performed a story of passion that overlays the soldier’s, the chief justice’s, the clergy’s, Isaiah’s, and the Empire’s authority, but they have also co-performed as creators, laying claim to Blondie’s garden as a space from which a woman’s sensuality can always be re-ignited. However, at the same time as



Sweatman announces Blondie as a truth of the universe, she appears to diminish the historical impact of 'their' coup. Blondie credits other women who have come before her for keeping the female sensuous body, as a force, alive within the adventure playground. She steps out of her role and speaks directly to the reader: "Women did that sort of thing back then too, you know" (266). Sweatman acknowledges that passion has already inspired women to live 'other' truths, but their experiences have been practiced in secrecy or have been ignored by the Empire.

Sweatman feels it is imperative to re-experience and mark those missing moments of passion without guilt or shame. Markotic describes the sex scenes in the novel as "extravagant" and "Not very agreeable," but yet "fruitful" (156). A few paragraphs later, she intimates that the "conception scenes" are so "overwrought" with emotion "to make sure" she "got the point" (157). Still Markotic misses the point and thinks that Sweatman is connecting a woman's sexuality to motherhood, while Sweatman is using the Empire's heterosexual imperative to dispel this cultural stereotype. Sweatman plays Blondie's life backward to a love-making scene in which Blondie admits that she had seduced Eli just for the fun of it: "let me say his warm, sweet hard-is-welcome, so we buckled gracefully down upon a bed of shining wheat straw" (266-267). Unlike her mother's love-making scene on the first page of the novel, Blondie does not care if they spill or if they are disguised. Nor is she concerned about being watched: "and then we heard . . . the excursion train loaded with harvest workers hooting at us" (267). Sweatman rejects Markotic's "sort of oh-not-tonight-dear" literature ("The future of Prairie Lit D 13), strips the passionate female body from its disguise of motherhood, and reclaims the female body as a "perfect mix" of freedom and solitude and passion and pleasure: Ecstasy.

Since Sweatman and Blondie have re-written, re-choreographed, and mentored the beginnings of their bodily discourse, ecstasy, within an orgasmic moment of pleasure that leaves the gender performative out, while at the same time short-circuiting the Empire's discourse, one would think that they have created an ideal environment within which their descendants' lives and stories could evolve and expand. However, with the birth of Blondie's own daughter, Helen, Blondie's story takes a turn that appears to baffle even Blondie. When Helen is born, Eli and Blondie "knew" her and yet did not (173).

Blondie awakens one morning, almost two months after her daughter's birth, and opens her "eyes directly into the solemn gaze" of her child, a child who bears "No resemblance to her mother," and who watches Blondie "with a look of unmistakable pity" (174). Blondie cannot take her eyes off her daughter. It is as if she "were waiting for her beauty to subside" (173). Marie, now a ghost, but "more corporeal than usual," smiles at Helen, "'Poor little one,' she said 'to be the cause of so much suffering'" (175). While Blondie protests that Helen "'is a joy,'" Marie's observations foreshadow a change in script: "'Powerful wishes are always innocent . . . . She will need more than forgiveness and mercy. But they will give her only pearls'" (175). Wyile suggests that Marie's ghost "functions as a barometer," acting out in "moments of crisis as the twentieth century unfolds in its repetitive cycles of violence" (743), and rightly so, Marie does fear its violence. She was raped by the Canadian soldiers. But Marie does not just fear what is past, she fears for Helen's future. She is privy to Blondie's discourse and acts as a guide and director, a compass. Freedom, for Sweatman, presents itself as a two-edged sword. Sweatman and Blondie's script overlays the adventure story, but its ruins are still present in the origin of their story, and if Helen chooses to create her story out of those ruins, that is her choice.

Sweatman reluctantly restarts the adventure story, and picks it up from when Blondie returns home from the Boer war. This time, it is Alice who moves Blondie's performative forward. Alice is aware of Blondie's ability to search out social and political meaning, and she sends Blondie back into the adventure narrative, out of disguise. Blondie is to perform the original mandate of her Histrionic theater, which was to inspect the capitalist's domain up close. As dangerous as it was for Alice, it is more dangerous for Blondie because she will forgo the theatre's stage, and play it out in John Anderson's home. At first Blondie hesitates, but her daughter, Helen, unites with Alice to push her performative forward: "And so it was Helen who chose John Anderson—that is, she chose John Anderson's house, and John Anderson was part of the package" (195). Helen enjoys working in the Anderson mansion, and Blondie feels that she will be safe as long as she works in the kitchen: "As long as they felt she was beneath them they couldn't harm her, their weapons would be misdirected. Shawls and such, lace collars, a nearly new pair of shoes" (209). Blondie infiltrates the capitalist "mansion," which takes

“on the look of a soldier’s uniform” (195), but the uniform and its gun transform into a business suit and its class, status, and style. Although Blondie has an “aversion to anything resembling a military officer” (195), she immerses herself in its political agenda. Imperialism slides into capitalism.

Blondie infiltrates the Anderson mansion and studies it from the inside, as a servant, to see if there is an alternate, humanitarian script harbored within it. Blondie and John Anderson’s friendship is nurtured in the “servants’ territory” of the mansion because John Anderson “liked the kitchen” (212), and yet Blondie furthers her education by listening to his guests discuss world politics while she serves them dinner: “Those dinners were the equivalent of the evening news” (213). Although Blondie describes her friendship with John as a distraction, she admits that together they “watched the gathering clouds of war” (216). On one hand, Blondie assesses the probability of war from an objective perspective: “I somehow just *knew* there would be a war. You get a different idea of things when you’re the invisible cook in the kitchen, listening in from the edges” (214). On the other hand, she feels its subjective process: “I had been filled with a reawakened grief for my friend Clark . . . . Another war was coming. I felt it in my bones” (214). John Anderson can only assess war from within the adventure story: “‘Well, we certainly hope you are mistaken, Blondie’” (214). At one point, Blondie unknowingly voiced her “thoughts out loud” in front of John’s dinner guests, and John complimented her on her political astuteness: “‘Blondie is quite the political philosopher,’” he said, and “Everyone laughed” (214). They laugh, but Blondie’s prediction, based on her body, is more credible than John’s inability to envision a role beyond a repeating historical pattern of war. However, like Clark’s moment of helplessness and humiliation, John, too, has a moment of weakness. When he asks to speak to Blondie, it is not to reprimand her for speaking out of place, but to talk more “about the possibility of war” (215). John identifies the “lie” behind Churchill’s “diplomacy” that “‘Boys like to fight’” (216), and Blondie agrees, knowing that soldier babies are born to fight whether they want to or not.

Although John Anderson considers himself too ‘stylish’ to imagine Blondie his equal outside the kitchen, he is attracted to her clever ideas about leadership and war. Reciprocally, Blondie is drawn to John’s charismatic personality, and is flattered when he

says that like her, he, too, is a “storyteller” (217). John is familiar with “stories as parable,” and understands as Blondie does that stories “are as false as they are true, in equal proportions, in equal tension; this is the nature of suspension” (217). In the kitchen, Blondie and John “sadly” understand Churchill’s “‘well-meaning’” plan of war: “‘He’ll kill as many of the enemy as he can. He’ll offer up the faithful British Islanders, and then he’ll come looking in the colonies for more young men and offer them up too’” (217). Reading John’s thoughts, Blondie knows that he is afraid for his son, and suggests that John get Richard familiar with boats and that maybe he “‘would enjoy the navy’” (217). John trusts Blondie’s prediction and solution enough to book a boat trip for his family on the maiden voyage of the Titanic. When Blondie and John discuss war within the kitchen, there is a suspension of time and space, an ellipsis that suspends class, sex, and gender. Sweatman is modeling Schechner’s idea of performance, creating an even playing field, a space in which true and false are laid out on the table as equal possibilities, and, for a moment, John and Blondie meet as humanitarians, both concerned about the Empire’s warring narrative and the welfare of John’s son.

However, the camaraderie that Blondie and John share in the kitchen is soon challenged by Helen’s demanding to travel to Europe on Richard’s invitation. Helen argues that Blondie wants to stifle her by keeping her working in the kitchen: “‘You want to keep me home so I can be just like you, a bitter old lady with dried-up skin. Your hands are wrinkled. Your face is wrinkled. I’m never going to be like you’” (223). Blondie retorts, “‘No, that’s true. You’ll be rich and beautiful and feel no pain and do no work and have many children who never cry, and you will never grow old because you’ll live in a glass casket and God help you’” (223). This is followed by “bitch,” a slap, and Blondie shouting, “‘You’ll do as I say!’ Of course Helen didn’t and wouldn’t” (223). Right on cue, John enters the kitchen, and says, “‘I thought I heard you sneeze,’” and smiles (223). This is not the alternate script that Blondie had hoped for and is reminiscent of Alice’s sneeze at the beginning of the novel, a sneeze on which Alice’s life turned. Angry, Blondie quits her job, saying that she will take her “deceitful bitch-goddess back to her father” (224), but John has a compromise, saying what an “education” Europe would be for a young girl (225). Blondie momentarily halts his story and demands to know who Helen will go as, meaning what role will she play, and John answers her

innocently, “‘She’ll go as Helen’” (225). History is repeating. Blondie only hopes that Helen remembers her grandmother’s performance strategies and her ability to stretch social and political meaning if she ever needs to escape the adventure story with her life.

Outside of the kitchen, John’s role is to funnel Blondie’s, Helen’s, and Richard’s adventurous spirits back to obedience to the Empire, even though he fears that he may lose Richard to the next war. Angry that John cannot shake himself free from the unrelenting control of the Empire and that he is using that power to manipulate Helen into his ‘stylish’ story, Blondie accuses John of being the “same” as his “butt-lazy cronies,” and is tempted to touch him and give him a “prod” of her “electric touch,” but of course, she does not and would not (224). As Marie’s ghost had predicted, John’s “innocence” wins “him vast returns” (225). As angry as Blondie is with John, she does admire his ability to think about another script. However, the ‘safer’ compromise that John chooses, on Blondie’s suggestion, leads to his death on the Titanic and his son, Richard’s, survival, only because Richard escapes with the women. Perhaps Blondie could have talked John into envisioning another script, but after his death, the adventure story is left in the hands of his cowardly son. Blondie loses faith: “Well, I let [Richard] have it with all the electrical energy I could muster. Half that voltage would have singed the eyelashes off an ordinary man. But Richard had the wits of a wooden mallet, and his wealth and prestige acted as the perfect insulation” (197). Worse, Richard becomes the aperture through which Helen chooses to create her life. Blondie loses her daughter to the very utopia that she had come to despise. Helen chooses her role as a “tourist in Eden” (200), and of course, like all the McCormack women before her, she will play her role with gusto, but nevertheless, Blondie is bereft: “Bereft is a suitable word. It slides into place. Yes. We were bereft” (304). Blondie resigns herself to letting Helen go, and Blondie’s character appears diminished in the second half of the text as Helen’s life takes center stage; however, Blondie continues in her role as narrator and mentor, spending her time updating the reader and working in her garden.

Sweatman has usurped the Empire’s performance strategies from the ruins of its adventure story. Alice mentors Blondie in the art of performance, and now Blondie utilizes those same performance strategies to both expose the redundancy of the adventure story and manifest her own body, as discourse. She tricks Roberts and Clark

into revealing to the reader the real motivation of the Empire, which is one of war and land acquisition. Once again, Blondie deflates Isaiah's idea of intimacy and the Empire's repeating epic of war, not in the theater as Alice did, but on the Empire's own world stage, the battlefield, and with its own soldier playing the leading role. In the ellipsis following Clark's death, Blondie shrinks the battlefield to the graveyard, and then invites her readers to feel the pain of the fallen soldier. Blondie is confident that if every soldier could feel the weight of his own action, there would be no more war. She tracks the power of the soldier's uniform, however 'stylish' it may have become, to its inevitable end, death. The male body, when stripped of his uniform and gun, is nothing more than a gesture, as Butler has argued -- a dispensable, disembodied mouthpiece, and a gun-wielding defender of Empire. Returning from the Boer war, Blondie works for John Anderson, and again shrinks the Empire's potency down to John's mansion, which resembles a uniform, and finally to John's son, Richard, a coward.

By rendering the Empire impotent on its own battlefield and shrinking its warring narrative down to Richard, Sweatman exposes the Empire's discourse as nothing more than a repetitive litany of endings, war, death, cowardly escapes, and bungling. The cry of the uncivilized for the Empire's white seed has lost its potency, but Sweatman keeps Richard and Scott's ghost around for her own amusement. Like Alice, Blondie plays the feminine and masculine roles of the gender performative until the almost extinction of her passion, and for the second time, Sweatman has rendered Butler's idea of gender variation redundant. By Butler resisting the notion that no "aspect of the subject is prediscursive," Barvosa-Carter quoting Seyla Benhabib argues that "the only resources for the variation of identity performances must stem from the very same chain of signification that forms the subject" (177). Further, "By collapsing the separation (and critical distance) between the subject and the social discourses that form her . . . Butler . . . inadvertently eliminated the resources necessary for human agency" (Barvosa-Carter 178). Arguably, gender variations reiterate the Empire's truths, more than they refute them.

Sweatman, on the other hand, births the novel and its heroine within a magical moment of ecstasy, Alice's orgasm. Surging electricity reconfigures Blondie's body and alters the reader's imagination and the course of history: Noticeably, Isaiah's "Cow and

calf” have vanished after Alice and Peter’s love scene early in the novel (7). As Tefs argues, “It’s quite a beginning for both novel and heroine” (83). With a bungler like Richard as the surveillance ‘eye’ of the Empire, Scott’s hand marking the re-birth of womanhood coupled with Blondie’s return, what had seemed the impossible, being born and escaping the social definition of the Empire, now seems possible.

Chapter 3: Helen and Dianna . . . ‘as’ . . . why not?

*If one is lucky, a solitary fantasy can totally transform one million realities.*

--Maya Angelou

Blondie’s adventuring shifts in a direction that even she does not understand as her daughter, Helen, chooses to marry Richard, the Empire’s prototype. Helen is born out

of a shared origin with her mother, grandmother, and all the voices of humanity, and yet she refuses to accept the “kiss” between the living and the dead, the “perfect and the imperfect” (371). Alice worries about Helen’s addiction to stylish clothes and jewellery, describing Helen as “desperado of luxury,” who was born with a fractured “soul” (190). Thinking that she could broaden Helen’s limited perspective, Alice has Helen accompany her to school, but every day after school, they stop at the “Evil Eye,” where dissidents congregate and discuss the many faces of revolution (183). While there, Helen keys in on the word “revolution,” understanding it as a battle that is fought both outside and inside the body.

Outside the body, as outside the Evil Eye, Winnipeg’s Mayor Sharpe enlists government militia from the Fort Osborne barracks to quash “a strike by the employees of the Electric Street Railway Company” (184): “there is a constant riot going on, stirred by the sharp fingers of soldiers” (185). Inside the Evil Eye, Helen dozes and dreams “of soldiers,” and deduces that “It is safe only behind danger, inside its ribs” (184). Helen mimics her dream and crawls up on the “biggest lap” of the strongest man, Mr. Cantor, the proprietor, and presses “her head against his chest” (183), listening to the “vibrating voices” inventing “a new medicine” of revolution (185). Helen deliberately misinterprets this revolutionary space inside Mr. Cantor’s chest and the Evil Eye as a nucleus of safety, “a cadre, a place of peace,” which she compares to her Grandmother Alice’s accommodating soul, when really Cantor’s soul is a nucleus of vibrating rage that represents the same cadre of war that drives the Empire’s soldier (185). Sweatman points out via Cantor that the only difference between the dissident soldier and the Empire’s soldier is wealth and bloodlines.

Within the adventure story, the Empire creates a circle of men who are descendants from proper bloodlines, and designates them as the protectors of the Empire, but all dissenters, even those who are British born, are deliberately erased from that privileged origin. Since Richard is the product of his father’s “good bloodlines,” he, like his father, is “born *right*” (194). John Anderson is a lawyer with hands that are “square and handsome,” as if formed by “God Himself to jingle loose change in the pant pocket of his blue wool suit” (194). Richard’s father’s status assures Richard a place within this inner circle, but his last name becomes even more prestigious when it is connected to the



quashing of the Winnipeg strike of 1919: “the construction trades and the metal workers had been on strike for nearly two weeks when Helen got invited to a luncheon at the home of Mr. Richard Anderson. Another thing the war did: it gave Richard his last name. Mr. Anderson it was, no more Richard” (289).

While this inner circle turns on wealth and bloodlines, and seems impermeable, the Empire cannot thwart dissenters amongst its own kind. Thus, it is continually forced to create another truth: “anyone” who is “fewer than two generations removed from Europe” is an ““enemy alien,”” and as a result, the Empire excommunicates the “labour leaders [who] were British-born” from their elite group (288). As the Empire’s circle of power diminishes to a “small island” of cloned Richards, who understand “solitude” as “a state of readiness . . . prepared for war” (307), Richard’s role as a soldier and protector expands beyond the Empire and its adventure story to the ‘isms’ that feed off Imperialism, Fascism, Capitalism, and Totalitarianism. At once, Sweatman magnifies Richard’s origin as a soldier, his name, and his destiny as the God-ordained protector of the ‘isms,’ and then deflates his authority by refusing to reiterate the Anderson name as a designated name of power ordained by God and the Empire: Blondie purposely calls Richard “Dick” (289).

Although Richard’s bloodlines guarantee him an elite space within the adventure story, Richard is always being monitored by the Empire, and his loyalty is being tested. If he falters, Richard will jeopardize both his offspring’s ‘right’ to be a part of the Empire’s inner circle of power and the regulatory system of the Empire itself. Since Richard escaped the Titanic with the women, he knows he is a coward and already a vulnerable gap in the Empire’s regulatory network. Thus, he hides his insecurities under the dress of power: a “Manitoba Club” is formed, “where they reassured one another with the beauty of their dinner jackets. The white collars on men are political forces never to be underestimated” (292). The club consists of white collars, dinner jackets, and sons, who together form an island of familiarity, a recognizable group of stylish soldiers who are obedient to the Empire. Since the regular police officers were sympathetic to the Winnipeg strike, the old boys’ club puts Richard “in charge of a unit of Specials—a private police force, like the good old Montreal Cavalry in the 1837 Rebellion” (292). On June 21, 1919, Richard, the capitalist and end result of the Empire, shoots at three

bystanders of a peaceful protest, two of whom are Eli and his friend, Mr. Kolchella. Richard's rage, like the rage of the Montreal cavalry soldiers, one of whom raped Marie, is misdirected and Richard 'acts out' inappropriately, injuring Eli. By hitting his target, Richard is shown to be a coward, but by missing his target, he is also a bungler of the adventure story. Since Richard is the prototype of the Empire's power, all soldiers of the adventure story are rendered cowards and bunglers.

In spite of Sweatman's revelation, the adventure story continues with Richard as the core of its regulatory process, playing both the leading man and the imposter. Into this utopian ideal of familiarity and cowardice, Blondie loses her daughter, Helen. Richard has a charismatic aloofness, a mysterious quality that draws Helen to him, "Something in Richard's way of laying his eyes on you, a blue looking that displaced you, did not take you in, but knocked you out of way, that he might take your place. But oh, Helen thought, it is an intelligence . . . . She would marry him" (245). Although Helen plays a dual role within this marriage as both a possession of Richard and an objective voyeur, Richard's aloofness played out under the disguise of love and marriage, appears to rob "Helen of herself" (178). Richard becomes addicted to Helen's beauty. He dresses and adorns her with stylish clothes and pearls and plays her protector, assuring Helen her style, status, and safety: "Helen's beauty was an attribute of such magnitude it became an independent creature, a sort of symbiotic organism that attached itself to my daughter" (178). Since Helen's beauty is both independent and symbiotic, it allows her to play the leading lady and the imposter with the same gusto as Richard: she rings the "butler's bell. Where *was* that man, what *was* his name, when *would* he come!" (309). For Sweatman, the role of the leading man and the imposter within the adventure story are one and the same, and still Richard bungles his role, whereas Helen is adept at playing many roles simultaneously.

Unlike Richard, Helen can just as easily play the role of the objective voyeur, and from this perspective Richard's aloofness is not charismatic, but the arrogance of a "posturing ass" (309). He is "A cold, tedious man with trivial interests, self-indulgent, always looking out for number one. How greedy, really; decadent, profligate!" (309). Helen's sentiments are reinforced by her grandfather's haunting voice: Richard is "A dissolute, bloodsucking parasite, a goddamn son of a bitch, a useless leech upon the

honest souls of the working class” (309). Blondie, a bit taken aback by Helen’s outburst, explains and apologizes to the reader on Helen’s behalf: Helen is “just irritated that she’s been stood up; she’s in a snit to find herself on stage without her leading man, living this drawing-room farce alone” (309). When Kramer suggests that a woman’s “truth comes convincingly from domestic nuances and their political implications” (173), I do not think he could have imagined a scene this explosive and political. Performance allows actors to “play with . . . not- for- the first-time” behaviour, but Richard’s inability to improvise irritates Helen (Schechner, WIPSA 361).

Richard’s bungling of his own story accelerates when Helen infiltrates the Empire’s bedroom. While Helen remains “virtuous” and “*married*,” but “not the least interested in love,” (306) “nothing so friendly or intimate as that” (309), Richard sleeps “in his own bedroom and rarely bothered her” (306). After the Titanic sank, Helen had taken to her bedroom for a two-year hiatus in order to think. During that time, Eli built her a loom and she started weaving rugs: “The loom banged, shuttled, interlaced warp with the filling threads of those moments when luxury had betrayed her” (240-241). Helen recreates a sketch of an “old Flemish” tapestry, ““The Lady and her Lover”” with the inscription, ““To my only desire,”” but it is clear to Richard that her “weaving bore no relationship to her sketching” (314). The ‘Lady’ in Helen’s tapestry is turning her back on “Richard’s blond locks,” while the lady’s “string of pearls” are being carried away by “a red-tailed hawk” (315). Sweatman brings the adventure story to a full stop: “Richard stopped breathing . . . he ran his fingers over the inchoate part, the new space that would scroll into view as [Helen] worked from left to right” (315). From the “green” of “her childhood home,” Blondie’s garden, Helen’s weaving reveals the “first lines of a man’s face,” with brown eyes and a “peaceful smile” (315). Richard does not recognize this man as anyone from his bloodline, and asks Helen, ““Who is this?”” (315). Helen replies honestly that she does not know, but she is not afraid of this new script, whereas Richard fears displacement: “Richard seemed to hum with pain” (315). Obviously, “This was a man from the world beyond. They both looked at him, wondering when he would come true” (315). Playing history backward to John Anderson, who was born “just *right*,” Sweatman exposes Richard’s impotence in the bedroom as a failure to uphold the

Empire's heterosexual imperative. He is short-circuiting his own story, making room for another leading man.

Helen switches roles easily and pursues her leading man outside the boundaries of the adventure story, stripping herself of her social status, style, and Richard, but in doing so, she jeopardizes her safety within that story. She disguises herself as a man and takes on the role of a hobo: "As an actress, character came to her from the inside out, a reversal of her real life. She knew the heartbeat of a hobo" (328-329). While hopping trains, there are times when Helen did feel "the pain of hunger" and "the occasional fear," but her increasing ability to feel only confirms "her passionate need" for more "acts of individual courage" (371). Since Richard sees her individual acts as needless play, he tries to funnel Helen's passion back into obedience, saying its time to come "'home'" and be "'respectable'": "'You had an adventure. Now it's time—what? —just grow up'" (339). Richard issues this ultimatum, but is a bit squeamish as he needs to "leave on a high note . . . the winner" (340). Sensing Helen's hostility, he says, "'Get rested, come home. We'll make a few changes, if you are so unhappy,'" but after he leaves Helen says, "'I'd rather be stuffed'" (340). Although Eli and Blondie are "scared" for, "but proud" of their daughter, as "it takes courage to lose your balance, to learn to fall" (340), they also know that Richard will persist and stick to them "like a bad debt" (340). For the first time, Helen steps out of her role and admits aloud to Ebenezer, a Presbyterian minister, and to her reader that she is "'an anarchist,'" even though she is not sure if that is "the right name for the leopard that lived inside her" (343). Whether or not anarchy is the appropriate word, Helen takes ownership of its meaning, not as a punished dissenter, but as a liberated woman, thinking, feeling, and making a choice: "'Now that's a rare bird'" (343).

Richard, oblivious to the change in script, keeps playing the old script of the Empire, but Helen's fervor for passion intensifies as she searches out other "acts of individual courage" (371). Once again, Helen re-affirms her desire "to be solo, to be entirely responsible for her own life," a role that demands "an active and prolonged extinction of her own counterfeit character" (371). She had been running away from Richard, "inventing herself as her own opposite," but occasionally she does miss "being kept" by Richard's "illusion of depth" (346). But at the Regina riot, Helen meets

Richard, eye to eye, on a battlefield of sorts, and those illusions are dispelled. From her visits to the Evil Eye, Helen vaguely understood a riot as “something grownups do, something with women and soldiers” (184), but in Regina, the meaning of riot is made clear to her: “The riot had triggered something in them both. Rage pure and simple, ran like booze through their veins from the distillery of their hearts” (346). Helen had “tried to escape,” but Richard’s “eyes” corner her, and Helen sees his “white collar” (346). Richard plays ‘as if’ he is the authoritative voice of the Empire and carries it as his “shield” (346): “‘Are you satisfied?’ he asked. His voice as soothing as gun oil. And something erotic, a suggestion of her promiscuity. As if her place in this mess could only be sexual” (346). Richard adds pejoratively, “‘How are you going to live?’” (346). Both Helen’s passion and her “homesickness” are “irrelevant” on this battlefield (346). Richard’s gaze and voice continue to displace and define her: “He kept her out” (346). Contrary to Butler’s argument, Richard does reduce Helen’s sexuality to an ‘effect’ of the Empire, but Helen, unbeknownst to Richard, is spinning her own adventure story around and through him.

Sweatman plays Helen’s adventure backward to Richard’s stopped breath, when he realized that he was going to be replaced as Helen’s leading man, and overlays the good bloodlines of the Anderson men with the ‘green’ of Helen’s tapestry. On a previous trip home, Helen had passed by the Trappist Monastery and her performative faltered for a moment when she met and kissed Bill, a monk. Helen, who usually “entered new scenes headlong,” is reduced to tiptoeing: “She curtsied, or stumbled” (330). While the kiss that they shared was “not fraternal,” it is only “one kiss,” but Sweatman’s readers remember that Alice’s life turned on a kiss: “on such things the world hinges” (331). On Helen’s next visit home, the “spire of the cathedral,” the “blood stone rising above the trees,” spark “a sanguine desire,” which surged “through her limbs,” igniting the “pilot light” that “burned inside her, a cool blue flame” (349). Sweatman creates a spiritual space, a suspended “pocket of time” within a Trappist Monastery, and Helen searches out Bill, who has taken a vow of silence, and who is himself a divine ellipsis (351). Bill enters Helen’s adventure as if he had been dropped from a “divine manhole” (351), and Helen spins Bill’s spiritual body into human form: “You could see that Brother Bill himself would not survive the delusion of singularity. He seemed to evaporate, to send

his cells outwards till he was light, almost invisible. It is generous, Helen saw, and dexterous, to be so light of soul" (354). Sweatman displaces Richard's bloodlines, which hold the adventurer in a constant state of readiness for war, inhaling and exhaling rage, with Bill's cells, which radiate passion outward from his soul, off the tapestry to Helen and to all the performers who can imagine a different script.

Short-circuiting Richard's bloodlines allows for the return of a previously erased discourse of passion. While Helen and Richard did not conceive a child within the capitalist mansion, Helen does conceive a child with Bill. In a choreographed foreplay of non-verbal words, Helen and Bill gesture and intuitively accommodate each other's story, but when word gets out that there is a "Woman" in the monastery, Helen and Bill flee (356). Once again, Helen stumbles, but this time she takes her direction from her body and goes headlong into a new scene. Both Bill and Helen get "hopelessly stuck in the gumbo" (358). While the "Blue mud climbed up Brother Bill's robes, turning him into living pottery," "Helen was a clay stick woman, gasping for breath" (358). Again, the purple thunder clouds swell and send "ice-hot twigs of silent lightning, ominously silent, long shoots of electrical juice sending roots" (358). Bill's "breath came in sobs" and Helen "went to him and tugged at his robes . . . . Her hand fumbled at his chest, seeking buttons . . . . she was desperately trying to undress a monk . . . . He emerged pale and streaked with mud" (358).

Bill and Helen, as did Eli and Blondie, displace the Empire's marriage citation and its heterosexual imperative with their own dramatic ceremony. They "looked at each other closely, eye to eye," as conspirators in love, "and then, with that leader stroke, leapt in the air still joined, straight up united . . . nuptials in lily white light" (359). For Bill, it is his first human experience of passion: "His first sight of a woman's breast, white alabaster veined with blue, his first touch, as lake water moving in his hand, his first knowledge" (358). For Helen, it is the first spiritual experience of passion: "bold, her thirsty kisses. She traveled all over, uttering her joy" (358). At once, Helen transforms herself, Bill, and the reader into that space of pure passion outside the Empire's jurisdiction and Sweatman displaces the Empire's marriage citation, its heterosexual hegemony, and Richard with Bill as Helen's new leading man and another McCormack woman slips into the adventure story. Dianna is conceived.

Changing roles for Helen is as easy as an intake of breath. She becomes a mother and within Richard's story, motherhood marks an end to freedom. In the ellipsis following Dianna's birth, Helen juxtaposes her impulse toward anarchy against the adventure story's idea of motherhood: "Helen so hated to be told what to do. And her impulse towards anarchy, her hatred of governance, her fear of and distaste for easy agreement, and her idealism (that restless rejection of the kiss between the perfect and the imperfect)—all of this became unbearably acute with the birth of Dianna" (371). Helen misses "being a man": "Not a receptacle, not a passive fountain of milk, not a mirror, not an ornament. A man! The very opposite of early motherhood" (371). Sweatman stretches the meaning of motherhood beyond guilt and judgment to include Helen's anarchy: Helen kisses Dianna and hands "her to Bill" (371).

Back in the Empire's adventure story, Helen takes part in a German parade, and while surrounded by swastikas and amidst the pushing and shoving, Helen breathes "out rancour and inhaled hatred" (376). She says, "I'm a boy," and she is "filled with hate" (377). Bill respects "Helen's urgent flight toward war . . . such a passion must be honoured . . . He was devoted to metamorphosis" (381). He knows that "Helen's spirit would endure. Spirits do" (381); Dianna does not protest: "maybe she retained the intimate knowledge of her mother's impossible body, for she was not accusing" (379). As Helen trades one gendered performative for another, it is not beauty but hatred that becomes the "independent creature, a sort of symbiotic organism" that attaches itself to Helen (178). Helen's role as an objective voyeur, a tourist in Eden, transforms into a subjective role. Her body feels the hatred of war, internally and externally: imperialism and capitalism slide into fascism.

As a soldier-mom and dissenter, Helen envisions the adventure playground as a battlefield. Her body mimics the parasitic relationship of hatred that the Empire breathes into its soldier, and that the soldier, in turn, breathes into the battlefield. Driven by this "hatred of Fascism" (367), Helen takes on the Empire's warring narrative, seeing "civil war under the skin" (345). While correlating the extinction of her body with the extinction of all war, she feels compelled "to fight with those who shared her love of freedom, or her hatred of confinement" (378). Because Helen was not born with her eyes wide open, as was Blondie, she has not experienced Alice's moment of compassion, and

hence, her inability to forgive makes her “uncomfortable almost anywhere on earth” (368). She does, however, appreciate her Grandmother Alice’s passion for histrionic theater: “Helen, anarchist, celebrated the advent of the absurd. Not since the days of the Histrionic Theatre has she been tempted by irony. She would join the republican army!” (378). At the same time that Helen is fighting fascism in Spain, she is fighting with the republican army, which condones a moderate amount of government control. Fighting for or against government control breeds the same hatred, and it was as Alice had predicted, the only thing that changes in war is the scale of the gun and the style of the uniform: “Now, a machine gun could fire six hundred rounds in sixty seconds, or ten shots a second. We get dressed up for efficient killing. The most stylish thing about the twentieth century is the uniform” (271). Inevitably, Helen’s obsessive need to play the soldier costs her her life. At first Sweatman appears to let Butler’s parodic ‘I’ die with Helen, but then grants it a reprieve. Sweatman overrides the adventure story and declares Helen missing.

While Helen plays her counterfeit character vehemently to its ‘almost’ death, neither conforming to nor accommodating another’s story, her body did momentarily step out of its role with Bill, and together they conceived a daughter: Dianna “was born in May 1936, just as Italy occupied Ethiopia” (370). She is “An innately a-theological child, deeply irreligious, and fixed to the cusp” (370). Since Sweatman has already usurped and elongated the ellipsis following Helen’s disappearance to accommodate Dianna’s adventure within Blondie’s garden near the Red River, she has created the ideal environment within which Dianna and Bill bond: Dianna’s face is “dominated by discerning eyes,” which reflect “Such a degree of consciousness” that they fill “her father with awe” (370). Dianna and Bill share a connection that stems from their recent ‘dropping’ into the adventure story, but Dianna is also firmly fixed to the cusp, accommodating the kiss between the perfect and the imperfect that her mother had rejected: Dianna is “born with her eyes wide open, solemn and attentive, as if what she was seeing for the first time was a confirmation of some earlier appraisal” (370). Although Dianna is born with an innate insight into both her father’s spiritual world and the very human world of her mother, she has a “noncommittal gaze” (371). Similar to Blondie’s birth, Dianna is born with a degree of consciousness that is not human, and yet



she is a female body with a birth date that has been documented in the history of the adventure story. But unlike Blondie, Dianna is motherless. Sweatman stretches the ellipsis surrounding Helen's death to accommodate Helen's 'missing' status, Dianna's birth and adventure, and Helen's eventual return, but leaves Butler's idea of a female 'I' as only a parodic act in the ruins of an old story, while freeing its willful passion, the sexed body, in Part Six of the novel.

Part Six of the novel is introduced without a date situating it in history and begins with its own Chapter 1. Within this ellipsis, Dianna, confused as to her whereabouts, spends her first five years of life unsure whether she is of the living or of the dead. Sharing a space with Bill in Blondie's garden insulates Dianna from the adventure story, but neither Bill nor Dianna know, as yet, how they fit into that story. So far they are just 'missing.' Dianna thinks she has nowhere to look for confirmation of her human body: "Her mother, Helen, is 'missing' and her godmother, Ida, is 'underground.' Not dead. Hiding from the government," and Bill is new to human form (385-386). Playing outside the Empire's regulatory system, and yet obviously still in Blondie's garden, Dianna grows "as cold as perfection itself," choosing to play the role of an objective voyeur (381). Dianna notices that even within this protected ellipsis, there is evidence of the fragmented adventure story: "*After* there is a carcass, lots of them, partial mice, bad meat in the woods, roadkill. Bodies. Being dead is one thing. But *before*. Dianna rubs her forehead. Where are we?" (385). Sweatman transforms Dianna into the 'I' that Butler deems possible, but will more likely be relegated "unknowable . . . when it no longer incorporates the norm in such a way that makes this 'I' fully recognizable" (UG 3). She arms Dianna with Alice's performance strategies, thinking of performance not only as an ideal medium within which womanhood can flourish, but also within which a woman's passion and willful play can transform itself into a strong selfhood. Within this ellipsis and still within the Empire's adventure playground, Dianna searches for the beginning or origin of her own story.

Dianna tries to piece together what comes before death and backtracks to what she knows to be true. She walks around 'their' shared property, carrying her sketch book, and drawing the road kill of an old story: she draws a "hand without skin," "Reproductive organs," and eventually a "woman's anatomy," a "spherical womb

suspended by strong ligaments” (389). Intrigued by the ‘missing’ stories surrounding those disembodied parts, Dianna remembers that when her mother sought peace, she crawled up on the lap of Mr. Cantor and pressed her ear against his chest. Dianna mimics her mother’s behavior and cradles herself “in her grandfather Eli’s lap” (387). As Dianna studies the “infinite lines” on his face and plays “with his missing parts—the lost thumb, the smithereens of his ear” (387), she becomes aware of a past script of passion and play-acting, dating back to Alice and Peter as lovers and jokers on the adventure playground. Eli and Dianna sigh, “Ahhhhh Ahhhhh. And laughed like spies in the Arctic, irrelevant and naughty” (387). Dianna remembers that her ancestors were created out of the ruins of an old story as jokesters first, and sexed bodies second, but then, to use Sweatman’s term, Dianna unremembers so that her performative into ecstasy reflects her own experience, and is “brought forth as if for the first time” (“On the virtues of analogy” 34). Sweatman creates a protected space and level playing field, a transformed Eden, although Eden may not be the appropriate word any longer.

Throughout her first five years, up to 1941, Dianna’s confusion as to her own whereabouts is haunted by a re-occurring dream about her ‘missing’ mother, Helen. In Dianna’s dream, Helen is still playing the soldier, and though she cannot find peace on earth, she refuses to go to heaven (386). During these ghostly visits with Helen, Dianna and Bill witness a man “awakening in the Fascist hospital to find that his captors had removed his *right* hand and *right* leg. They were there with him when he died of shock” (390). In a performative that resembles Blondie’s ellipsis following Clark’s death, Helen reveals to Dianna and Bill the end results of war as dismemberment and death. Blondie steps in with an update, which reinforces Dianna’s conclusions: “The war focused on the Eastern Front. January 1945” (390): the “young Russian soldiers raped the German woman and nailed her hands to the family cart,” while “Her children huddled in the watery ditch beside the road,” and five months later that mother murdered all six children (390). Sifting through the ruins of this adventure story, Dianna identifies the real casualties of a warring narrative: “War is about family, about mothers” (390). Although Wyile thinks Helen’s ghost plays mostly a “cautionary function,” as Helen’s visitations “underscore that political atrocities respect no party lines” and emphasize that “the political is also personal” (747), they also depict Helen’s desire for peace. Her visitations

are more about sharing a moment of compassion, forgiveness, and mercy. Dianna is bereft, and brings the adventure story to a full stop, not with a gun shot, but with a moment of solitude: neither Bill nor Dianna said a word for many days, “They just said they’d been visiting Helen, ‘Seeing Mama’” (390). Dianna’s sharing a moment of pure compassion with her mother frees both their spirits; Dianna refuses to reiterate the war propaganda of an old story that boys like to fight and Helen waits for her imminent return.

Although Dianna thinks that she has no one to confirm her humanity, both Helen and Bill have mentored ‘missing’ and a moment of compassion as creative opportunities from which Dianna’s story can evolve. In the spring of 1950, Dianna is almost fourteen years old. After a prolonged winter and too much snow, floods are a real possibility. At first, Bill ignores the threat of a flood, but then he gets “on the phone, a rare event for a silent man, entering the real world as steady and alert as Eisenhower” to see about sand bags (393). Bill changes roles reluctantly to play the politician-commander, but his authoritative manner upsets Dianna, and she channels her frustration into her drawings. Even though the butterfly field is under a six-foot snow bank, Dianna is “fascinated by the swellings on the branches of the rose bushes that pushed up like drowning hands” (393). Her intention is to capture “the slow motion of that spring” and “sketch the leaves’ development,” but a severe cold spell, along with the possibility of a flood, speed up her sketching as her “quick, fluent lines” try to capture “the essentials of the plant” (393). In need of reinforcements, Dianna looks up to the sky, and sees a white glider, with “bird-like wings,” landing so close to her that she “can see the amber glue that holds it together” (394). Dianna improvises, “waiting to see what language” the pilot speaks, and Jack answers in English, ““take me to your field commander”” (394). Bill greets Jack as if he were expecting him. With Jack’s arrival, Dianna reluctantly takes on the dangerous role of a war artist, a romanticism that she was trying to avoid. The river is rising, forcing Dianna into fast motion: she draws “Black branches, the bare suggestion of buds, white page” (395). Dianna may be forced into action, but she remembers that when her great-grandmother Alice, grandmother Blondie, and her mother pursued their war artistry, Alice was jailed, Blondie went home, and her mother, Helen, went ‘missing.’

Two days later, the junction goes under, leaving Dianna, Jack, Bill, and Blondie surrounded by water. Blondie had saved Dianna's drawings from the flood and Bill fingers them, knowing that the utopian vision of Isaiah's intimacy has to be performed to its *almost* extinction before Dianna's performative can continue. Help comes from all around and everyone acts with an obsessed energy, like "FERAL CATS," sand bagging and plugging the dike (404): "It was wonderful to let go of cleanliness, sleep, routine. In the absence of cleanliness we were immaculate, purged of habit, speaking to one another in special terms, our good manners a dike protecting us from fear" (401). Together, they create a suspended moment of solitude devoid of class, gender, sex, and race that is similar to John Anderson's kitchen: "We became an island" (404). Their collaborative performative escalates as the "temperature" rises, and all the actors "were going flat out to fight the flood" (401): "Bill was strangely out of his skin" (401), and even Richard worked "non-stop" and "wordless" (410). Richard, who is part of the Empire's island of men who were born "*right*" is now working to save an island that is momentarily purged of Empire. While Richard's attention is diverted, Sweatman pushes the Empire's interpretation of Isaiah's marine utopia to its true mandate: Instead of war, Isaiah had meant "generosity," "one of the simplest instincts of crazy old humankind" (400). Isaiah's words had been appropriated by the Empire and held captive just like "all of us" to further its warring narrative (303), but thanks to Richard, Sweatman exposes the origin of the Empire's warring narrative as fraudulent and stretches the boundaries of anarchy to include generosity right under the noses of the R.C.M.P and the Canadian government.

Dianna, Jack, Bill, and Blondie have been mobilized into action, and their play turns serious work into anarchy. They pretend to fear what will happen when the dike breaks. Isaiah's prophecy did say that behind those "peaceful" waters lies "total agreement," "extreme familiarity, intimacy," and "the loss of distinction" (303). But when the dike bursts, it is "The smell of mud . . . rich and exclusive" and the waters of the Red that enter their house, exploding windows, climbing the walls, and stopping just short of Bill and Dianna's perch under the eaves (407). Instead of funneling Bill and Dianna's passion and freedom back into obedience to the Empire, the Red River purges them of the Empire's old story, reducing it to ruins. However, those ruins still harbor the final scene of its repeating war narrative, which is always the death of a soldier, and as

before, that scene has to be played out. Jack tells Blondie that Helen had “faced the firing squad” (402). Eli says, ““She’s dead, isn’t she,”” but Bill already knows (406), and Jack is silent (403). Blondie not only grieves the flooding of Marie’s grotto and Peter and Alice’s graves, but also “the intimation” that her “daughter had suffered” (401). While the Empire’s regulating network misinterprets the flood as the end of another war, and moves automatically into a post-war period of peace, Sweatman’s adventure transforms endings into new beginnings. Sweatman bursts Isaiah’s utopian bag of familiarity, pumps in “an ocean of air,” and frees “all of us” who are swimming “here and there,” “muttering about love and pain” (303). Blondie entertains a “second part of the story, the escape” (403), while Dianna crawls “over to look out the small porthole under the eaves. Her mother would need a boat” (407). Anarchy, using Schechner’s terms, is the “improvisational imposition of order, the making of order out of disorder” (EPT 56). Sweatman through Dianna replaces old fears with the possibility of new realities.

After the flood, Sweatman could have erased the Empire from her adventure story, but she recognizes that there many people besides Helen who know another story, but are still trapped within the Empire’s discourse. Richard unknowingly works with Dianna in purging her ellipsis of irrelevance, the Empire, or as he puts it, “junk” (410), but their joint action also preserves post-war Canada as a “tragedy-free zone” (391). Although Jack and Helen’s visits bring “wartime propaganda” back to ‘their property’ (414), the ellipsis and Richard insulate Dianna from its rancor. Feeling safe, Dianna starts sketching ALL life that has gone ‘missing’ along the roadway, all stories. For example, the reader remembers that the Nazis had run Einstein out of Germany and Ida, Blondie’s godmother, wants to bring him home to Blondie’s garden (362). They also remember ““The Big Three at Yalta, 1945”” photograph of Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin, with the caption, ““where the shape of post-war Eastern and Central Europe was decided”” (420). Blondie points out that Roosevelt “wore a cape over a suit, looking long of limb, capable of dance, like an artist stuck between two generals” (420). Like Blondie and Alice before her, Dianna’s soul is large enough to accommodate scientists and politicians from an old story, and Richard secures Blondie’s garden as a no war zone and enables their escape.

Richard underestimates the power of Dianna's war artistry and Bill's mentorship of Dianna's artistic soul. To Blondie and the reader, Bill walks "beneath the shattered sky as transitive as a new leaf. In his white pyjamas, he walked so much that he remained lithe and light. Somehow my dark daughter had given us this bright man full of grace" (425). To Richard, Bill is no more than a flake, who lives in the imaginary world of his butterfly garden: he is "neither romantic nor entirely rational" (425). Richard sees Bill as a child leading a child, and so when Dianna becomes a young adult, he decides, as he did for Helen, that she has had her adventure, and now it is time for her to grow up and be respectable. He pays for her college education to become a lawyer, and it is his name that gets Dianna her first position in one of "Winnipeg's most limestone law firm[s]"—the "'old firm'" (424). The old firm is exclusionary at best: it "meant no Ukrainians or Jews," and it relegates Dianna to "an instant 'spinster,'" or as she would soon be known, "'a women's libber'" (425). While Dianna lunches with Richard "three times a week" (415), Blondie admits that she does not know what they talk about, but assumes their conversation "would be free of substance and stuffed with bone-building bigotry against Indians, Jews, Communists and women" (415). Dianna pretends to like Richard's "*style*" and dresses "the part" (425): "she was only twenty-six . . . sustained a lonely life. She saw a lot of Richard. Richard was the most static man" (425). Richard's name has the power to grant Dianna soul and name within the gendered performative, but Dianna uses his name to expose the bigotry and static nature of the Empire's regulatory process. At the same time, Bill, Dianna's real father, mentors transitivity, an ability to change or pass from one condition, place, form, or stage to another, like a bud to a new leaf, a process that Dianna and the reader have already experienced.

Sweatman continues to play with the line from Isaiah's idea of intimacy, "and a little child shall lead them," and transforms that child into Dianna. Dianna tries to hold her passion in check to avoid the 'romanticism' of her mother and to please Richard. She restricts her reproductive drawings "to the margins of her law books," but her passion overflows textual boundaries, mimicking the breaking of the dike: "Buttercups bloomed over case law, the Bank Act, superior ovary, trust, sepals of calyx, inheritance tax, pistil" (415). Dianna's repressed passion seems ready to burst because whenever Jack was around, "you could see the heat build up in her" (425). But Dianna denies her passion,

transforms it into internalized rage, and funnels it into action. By avoiding romanticism, Dianna “sure got trapped by rage” (425). As did her predecessors, Dianna disguises herself as a man, pursues “Man’s Freedom,” and takes “action against American imperialism” (426). Deliberately ‘acting out’ and disregarding a small jolt of energy from her grandmother, she strikes out against the very society that sustains her old law firm: Dianna rides “off to deface an American flag at the Legislative Building,” carrying a placard sign reading, “PIGS GET OUT OF CUBA” (426). Like Alice, Blondie, and Helen before her, Dianna’s role as a dissenter gets her in trouble: “When she came to, she was in the back seat of my car, wrapped in the Stars and Stripes, bleeding all over [Blondie’s] leather seats being driven home” by a Hungarian refugee (426). Sweatman dangles a moment of passion in front of the readers and leaves them with the image of Dianna’s reproductive drawings overflowing the margins of the Empire’s laws and bank notes juxtaposed against Dianna’s bleeding body.

At home in Blondie’s garden, Sweatman continues to play with Richard as the puppet or surveillance ‘eye’ of the Empire. Dianna tells Richard that she is going to document every story of passion: “I want to draw every plant, every blade of grass on the land . . . . Some of it’s quite rare . . . and it needs to be—what?—marked. Kept on paper. I might even try to draw the things that used to be here, that went extinct . . . I think it’s going to be . . . big,” but Richard trivializes her intentions and responds with his usual line, “supposing . . . you don’t marry anybody . . . how are you going to *live*?” (437). Annoyed with Richard, but still maintaining a semblance of loyalty to him just as her mother had done, Dianna assesses him with her discerning anatomist’s stare. She is unsure of a word that sums up his character. While Ida, Dianna’s godmother, whispers the word “*Fascist*” from the grave, Dianna thinks that fascism is more “out there,” whereas Richard is right there in front of her (437). Since he is the ruin of all the ‘isms,’ imperialism, capitalism, fascism, and totalitarianism, Dianna thinks that a more appropriate word is simply, “*Richard*. Because Richard will never let anything happen other than Richard” (438). Kramer argues that the novel is best “when it veers away from history’s big moments and . . . brings us private, felt lives” (173). Arguably, Dianna’s “big” moment is both historical and private, and reveals another convincing

“truth” (173). She strips Richard of his status and style, and reduces him to a ruin of his own story and his authoritative discourse to “banal” gossip (437).

Diminished as his role has become, Richard continues to play the Empire’s Adam and capitalist, at times the fascist, and always the totalitarian. Flexing his authority, Richard decides that Jack’s suspicious and untraceable origin makes him nervous, and insists that Jack must go. If Dianna resists, Richard will call in ‘their’ loan. Mimicking the Chief Justice’s role from Alice’s performative, Richard resorts to blackmail, but Dianna does not respond to his manipulative tactics; in fact, Richard is “spooked” when Dianna turns her “anatomist’s stare” on him (446): He mumbles, ““This is a new role for me”” and that Dianna should ““Help”” him ““out a little”” as he nervously slides back into his car (446). Richard’s intimidating tactics reminds the reader of a photograph of Winston Churchill and “Canada’s secretary of state, Lester B. Pearson,” in which even Churchill looks embarrassed (421). Blondie interjects with a brief explanation: “Maybe what’s embarrassing Churchill is the fact that Mike Pearson is wearing the exact same clothes as he is. Exact. The bow tie, the deep blue pinstripe suit, the watch chain; they’re doing the same thing with their hands, left hand in trouser pocket, right hand holding a cigar in front of a paunch in a vest” (421). Sweatman pushes intimidation and familiarity, as gestures of power, into a comedic act in private and on the Empire’s world stage. Still, Dianna resists the urge to push Richard, and all his derivatives, into extinction. Instead, she draws him in a constant state of repetition, basking in his own familiarity, as intimidation: Dianna begins “to incorporate insects into her drawings, spiders and wasps and the like . . . . These were her most terrifying paintings. They invoked themselves, over and over; this is this is this is this” is Richard (447). Sweatman catches the essence of the Empire’s regulatory network in a historically specific photograph and drawing, which in her world of performance invokes itself over and over again in jest.

Free of the Empire’s warring narrative, Dianna embraces her role as a “war artist” (444). She trades the recognizable uniforms of her soldier-moms and the suits of the capitalist soldiers for an unfamiliar one of “three skirts and earrings as big as muskie lures, beads and feathers dangling under her long, limp hair . . . . On her feet a pair of Eli’s old cowboy boots” (432). Dianna juxtaposes the drawings of her ‘anatomist’s stare’



as a physicist, from *before* the flood against the drawings of her reproducing artist's eye *after* the flood. As a physicist, Dianna understands "the world," as if she were the Empire: "as a diagram or formal plan upon which our mad relationships ricocheted between points of observation. I guess she was a physicist. She saw the world as lines connected by force" (413-414). Sweatman traces that world paradigm backward from the soldier's fragmented body and spirit, to the soldier's uniform, to the lawyer, to the chief justice, to the monarchy, to the ruins of an old story. Within the ruins, Sweatman uncovers the redundant configuration of 'isms,' imperialism, capitalism and fascism, huddled cowardly behind the usurped words of Isaiah, still shivering with the "certainty" of totalitarianism (439): "It's an agreement of totality" (303). Peeling back layers of redundancy, Dianna's anatomist's stare exposes the Empire's 'cover-up,' undresses the 'hyperbolized' 'isms, and strips the soldier naked, bringing the adventure story to a full stop, but Sweatman does not leave the male adventurer without hope. Her other male characters, Peter, Eli, Bill, and Jack, have mentored a liberating masculinity, but Sweatman gets a bit petulant with Richard's inability to see it, and leaves him behind, waiting at the end of his story "for his world to begin again" (437). If Richard wants out of captivity, he will have to act his way out. Sweatman does detect an "innate tremor," but perhaps it is only fear (437). For the time being, she declares Richard 'missing.'

As an artist after the flood, Dianna realizes that the puncturing of Isaiah's marine utopia had already released this missing passion of womanhood back into the adventure story. Womanhood may have been shivering within the Empire's repeating warring narrative, but it was always there, lying low in a latent stage and now, under Dianna's direction, it is ready to evolve and explode. Dianna devotes "all her intensity to 'our property,' as if it was a formula for the entire world" (429). She begins "to draw botanical illustrations of rare and subtle honesty" (429), and Sweatman, through Blondie's eyes, traces that honesty backward from the "immortal words" of Mrs. Kennedy, "'I go where Jack needs me and I try to stay out of the way,'" to "a bloodthirsty and pregnant woman dressed in a buffalo robe," aiming "her rifle at the chest of a blindfolded man" (270). She reveals what is "blatantly obvious," not that women should stay out of the way, but "that if women were in the driver's seat, there'd be no war . . . no

injustice” (270). Sweatman stretches honesty to its origin, not to a gun-wielding soldier, but to Alice’s moment of despair and compassion.

Dianna knows that a woman’s missing passion has been released, and it is honest and compassionate, but she also knows that for Blondie’s reproductive discourse, her body, to become a truth, it must claim space on the page. Since Dianna’s ellipsis begins when Helen leaves and ends with her return, it is no longer a space ‘out there,’ but a moment of solitude claiming a time and space within Blondie’s garden, but without words and assembled sentences, Blondie’s reproductive discourse, mandate, and garden seem isolated and diminished. Within this atmosphere of feigned diminution, Dianna’s war artistry intensifies, becoming more intricate and dangerous until her paintings evolve into a script of anarchy. She destroys and reconfigures the atomic structure of the plants within Blondie’s garden and transforms them into words on a page: “The way Dianna painted meadow rue, even blue flag, was uneasy, the very atoms had been destroyed so they could be reassembled on the page, where they shivered with certainty” (439). Reducing her sketches to their simplest form, Dianna captures the atomic potency of Alice’s “unkempt new country . . . in artistic form” (18) and Blondie’s army on the white page: “Exposed ovaries, stamens, fruit, in the perfect restraint of scale, utterly sexual yet without the flagrant exaggerations associated with lust” (439-440). Dianna’s soldiers are “more potent and bold” than even Blondie could have imagined (439). Blondie is overwhelmed by Dianna’s paintings and how they capture her essence so completely: ““They are so . . . reproductive”” (440). Through Dianna, Sweatman usurps the energy of the atom, and commandeers its nuclear potential to reclaim, reconfigure, and reassemble an atom of anarchy as passion’s performative counterpart. She captures the essence of Blondie in historically specific paintings that reproduce themselves over and over again in passion and freedom.

Sweatman has re-charged and re-connected the female body to its lost passion during orgasm, and now has reconfigured the body to act out its passion from its simplest form, the atom. Alice and Blondie have prepared the adventure playground for Blondie’s arrival; Blondie, as origin and reproductive force, has lived it; Dianna has drawn and recorded it as performance. Passion is back, but it is not “merely decorative” (439), filling pages. It is political: it is 1956, the nuclear age is threatening American and

Canadian freedom, Dianna is twenty, and her “virginity [is] nuclear” (415). Blondie steps in with a quick overview for her readers: “Here we were, with the Second World War vets all grown up and running the show less than twenty years after yet another armistice, and it seemed natural to consider the circumstances in which we were about to experience an atomic war. It must have been all that war-jism” (422). As nuclear tension is escalating to war, so is the sexual tension rising between Dianna and Jack. Jack had taken up residence in the “bottom cup of the oxbow,” an area steeped in the intimacy of the Manitoba gumbo (415). He is a man who knew “the extent of himself . . . Always pushing himself,” needing “to be out of his element” (429). Dianna, too, had “accepted the threat of nuclear war as if it were a birthmark on the face of reality” (422). Sweatman juxtaposes Dianna’s nuclear war of passion against the threat of a ‘real’ nuclear war, only this time the Empire will be confronting Dianna’s idea of a soldier on her battlefield.

In Dianna’s world of performance, what the Empire identifies as ‘war-jism’ (422) is really foreplay: Dianna strokes “her breasts; the smell of dye from her skirts rose like alcohol; where rain hit, it steamed upon her” (450). She seduces Jack into Marie’s grotto; the room is like the “the inside of a bomb” (450). Jack “touched her, committing himself to that touch” (450). What the adventure story identifies as a nuclear explosion . . . BIG BANG . . . is really a creating and liberating orgasm:

When the lightning hit the pine . . . . It drove the lovers down through the earth . . . . Sap exploded, pine cones burst, needles roared into flame. He entered her and lifted her up like a burning flag. The roof blew away and they clung together through a snowstorm of seeds, an explosion of gunpowder, a cluster of hot stars kindled between them. (450-451)

What the Empire sees as a battle and the spreading of its good white seed, is really its demise within an explosion of passion. Dianna metaphorically burns the flag and blows the roof off the capitalist mansion, not just as an act of resistance, but to celebrate her body as both a reproductive and a political force.

What the Empire sees as post-war-period peace, a time to relish the spoils of war and prepare for the next war, is a coup. It is now the Empire that misinterprets Dianna’s adventure, thinking that the purging of Blondie’s garden with fire is the punishment that will funnel Dianna’s freedom back to obedience. Instead, Dianna’s nuclear orgasm

purges Blondie's garden of an old warring narrative and transforms its ruins into the ruins of her story: "These are our ruins: the standing trees like black tooth-picks, the stone floor and the remains of an iron chimney" (454). Gone are the traditional endings and mappings of the Empire's adventure story: "Ida's granite headstone," "dear paths in the woods," "the trails between the houses," and "there is no trace of the lilies that marked the graves of Alice and Peter" (454). Marie's grotto is also gone. Since Dianna is no longer in need of reinforcements, Jack easily changes roles: "His face was suddenly haggard, he seemed almost frightening when the irony was stripped away" (450). He hauls out his glider plane, hooks it on to Blondie's car as Noddy speeds towards the burning ash trees, and then "braking fiercely, but the glider was already in the air. He lifted on heat, in the firestorm, a thermal that carried Jack high" (452). Jack's glider drags the idea of war out of the text, out of the adventure story, and out of Dianna's ellipsis: Jack's glider "flew so high it was a new moon, a pure white spur with Mars in its hook" (452). Dianna's body acts, at once, 'as' the 'war' to end all wars and displaces the end of the Empire's performative with a reconfigured and elongated cadre of peace.

Sweatman's world as performance shifts and stretches its boundaries, but as Schechner reminds us, it does not lose sight of the individual. Amidst this exaggerated nuclear orgasm, Dianna conceives Helen and Sweatman's creative process begins again. Helen is "Born with her eyes open" (455). She is "infinitely familiar. And infinitely new" (455). Guests and ghosts are present: Alice, Peter, and Marie, and even the "damp Orangeman, Thomas Scott" (455). As they pass by admiring Dianna's "beautiful girl," "a mark appears" on her "chest, a tiny plum, a burnt kiss" (456). Dianna cries out in joy and kisses the mark, "as if to keep it there" (456). Wyile thinks of Blondie as a ghost (748), but after Dianna's guests pass by and Blondie longs to speak to her parents, "They don't even glance my way but sit in silence, they on their side, we on ours" (455). With Helen's return, Dianna's ellipsis moves to the epilogue, and is noticeably outside the story, but it is not an end. Dianna continues to give all her intensity to 'our property,' not 'as if' it was a formula for the entire world, but 'as' the formula. Her passion is that of a "stubborn . . . one who has chucked everything and gained everything in the same grand gesture" (456). She still wears her three skirts, lives on McCormack land, and continues to draw.

Blondie contemplates following Eli, who has passed “on” (456), but admits she is “curious to see the fruitfulness of the apple trees. And besides, my great-granddaughter has the blackest hair, the reddest lips and the most insolent habits ever known to womankind” (456-457). Helen’s demeanor resembles her namesake, Blondie’s daughter, Helen, but Dianna’s Helen is born with “her eyes open.” Still, Blondie narrates that Helen is “running across my garden, the sun soaking into her long hair . . . . She has become a high and mighty young woman, and she’s absolutely no help at all with the weeding” (457). She is “tempted to chase her out of here before she tramples my delicate nest of meadowlarks hidden there, doesn’t she see it? Among the blue-eyed grass” (457). Butler is right in that the transformation into a world beyond gender will not be easy, but it is no longer impossible. As Alice says, “‘It’s messy, this world . . . . that’s what I love about it’” (330).

While the Empire’s regulatory network does not recognize individual acts of courage, Dianna performs on a world stage for the reader and through the reader. She combines all types of play in a complex performance of self-creation. Dianna imitates, repeats, and exaggerates the Empire’s regulatory network’s dependence on familiarity and obedience through Richard until it falls, but she preserves Richard’s nervousness and staticness in a drawing that will remain in the ruins of her story. She undermines the discursive authority of the Empire by pushing the meaning of familiar words into a bodily discourse, for example, war jism, nuclear war, and post-war period of peace into foreplay, orgasm, and Big Bang. Dianna performs her ‘I’ as both willful and passionate, as a moment of reclaimed ecstasy. She is savvy and no longer intimidated by the Empire’s adventure story. Instead, Dianna openly sifts through its ruins and transforms performance strategies, a few of its performers, science, and the scientist into the origin of her story. Dianna is a war artist, performing herself into being as a dynamic, passionate, and very political female body, armed not with a gun, but with an artistic ‘eye,’ a sexy body, a sketching pencil, and an unlimited potential to play-act.

Conclusion: What comes after . . . another beginning . . .

“And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned

child shall put [her] hand on the cockatrice' den." --Isaiah 11:8

"Reality is not to be trusted any more than a dream."

-Blondie McCormack (435)

My argument throughout this thesis has been that Sweatman uses performance and play within moments of ecstasy to track the deliberately erased female body's passion back into the adventure story as the core of selfhood and womanhood. She frees a woman's sensuality from textual and imperial constraints, or 'ism' captivity, and transforms the gender performative into an unlimited potential to play-act. In Chapter 1, Alice, playing the shameless voyeur and plagiarist, disguises herself as a male adventurer and plays the gender performative as both a prescribed role and a choice. Although exhausting and chaotic, Alice's sidwinding mentors a bodily discourse that, at once, performs the empire's discourse and deflates its authority. At the same time, she shares her jokes, laughter, and winks with her students and the reader, and mentors the performance strategies of histrionics, hyperbole, transvestism, and feigned diminution as empowering tools of the evolving self.

In Chapter 2, Blondie uses her mother's performance strategies to organize her play, as she, too, mimics the empire's creative process. However, Blondie is not mimicking the empire's adventure story to reproduce another authoritative regulatory process; rather, she mimics this process to examine both the empire's battlefield and its capitalist mansion for social responsibility (humanity). Under her scrutiny, as both a shameless voyeur and plagiarist, the empire's regulatory network unravels and bungles its own story, reducing its creative process to somebody's idea of a joke. Although Blondie does experience moments of humanity within the empire's adventure story, compassion is only realized in the ellipses, for example, in the graveyard after Clark's death and in John Anderson's kitchen. Blondie concludes that only when mothers and soldiers are stripped of their gender performances do they meet as concerned and grieving equals.

At the same time, Blondie reenters the adventure story within her mother's explosive and dramatic orgasm. She presents as a jokester first and sexed body second. Recognizing her body as an electrically charged moment of ecstasy (passion and

freedom), Blondie both fears her sexual potency and longs to experience it. After bungling her first love scene with Eli, Blondie pretends that her passion is so powerful that it makes everything and everyone she loves disappear. As a punishment, she banishes herself into textuality. But after the Boer war, Blondie strips herself of her uniform and embraces her sensuality, trusting her body to lead her home to her garden. With Eli, she experiences that moment within orgasmic passion that leaves out the gender performative, and she reproduces womanhood under the guise of the empire's heterosexual imperative. Helen is conceived.

While both Blondie and Alice are adept at playing the gender performative and experiencing their bodies as origin and agency, in Chapter 3 Helen and Dianna's performances push identity politics into social and political responsibility. Helen plays both the female and male gender performatives, and occasionally herself, with gusto. She plays the objectified wife of Richard only to expose the empire's soldier prototype as both an incompetent actor and impotent lover. Then Helen changes roles and breathes in the rage and hatred of war, playing the empire's warring narrative until her *almost* extinction. She thinks that with her death, the empire's authoritative discourse will also die, but finds out that even after death, she is its captive. In-between performatives, Helen shares a passionate moment beyond the empire's jurisdiction with Bill, a monk, and conceives Dianna.

Sweatman extends Dianna's ellipsis from Helen's leaving until her return. Playing with textual authority, Sweatman deliberately leaves out the identifying historical dates of the novel's Part Six. Within this exaggerated ellipsis, Dianna expands individual play socially and politically. As a war artist, Dianna draws all the plants in Blondie's garden and reconfigures their atoms into words on a page. She captures the essence of Blondie's reproductive narrative, and performs her own rendition of Blondie in a sexually provocative and yet socially responsible, historically specific, going-nuclear scene. She blows up the capitalist's mansion, and burns the American flag. Dianna celebrates her body as its own big bang. Helen is conceived.

In many ways, *When Alice Lay Down With Peter* reflects Frederick Roden's overview of the "culture of the 1990's" (33). He says, in "Becoming Butlerian: On the Discursive Limits (and Potentials) of *Gender Trouble*," that it was a time that "offered

many sites for willful play with gender capacity to make and remake performances” (33). He points to the “active aftershock,” following the publication of *Gender Trouble*, in which “any kind of performance” was labeled as a “Butlerian performative, whether the intention to gender-bend [was] present or not” (29). With the resulting “destabilization of categories of gender identity” and the loss of the idealized self, a space opened for what Butler coined as the “differentiation of self” (Roden 34). Problematic here is not the word willful, the loss of the idealized self, or differentiation because Sweatman herself encourages, teaches, and mentors the ‘fall’ from idealization as a precursor to passion and freedom, but the phrase “gender capacity.” It suggests a quota, a limited number of stories, and is eerily reminiscent of the empire’s adventure story and its canon.

Performance, on the other hand, bursts boundaries and transforms limiting gender variations into an unlimited potential to play. In John Anderson’s kitchen, Blondie and John meet as storytellers, understanding the “nature of suspension” as being a space in which stories are as equally true as they are false (217). However, outside the kitchen, as it was outside the “Evil Eye,” Blondie is not John’s equal and storytelling is restricted to reiterating the empire’s story. The empire’s story is a command imposed on the body, whereas performance, for Sweatman, evolves from inside the body and radiates outward in its desire for passion and freedom. Helen says, “As an actress, character came to her from the inside out, a reversal of her real life” (328-329). Blondie interprets this “inside out” as Alice’s accommodating soul, a cadre of peace, an exaggerated orgasm of pure pleasure, and her own overabundance of electricity. Dianna draws and performs it as a reconfiguration of the atom and its nuclear potential. By the end of the novel, the reader realizes that the only reconfiguration that has occurred is that women are re-connecting with their own unlimited potential to play and create. Sweatman re-claims an ever-expanding suspended space outside the kitchen, the Evil Eye, and the adventure story in Blondie’s garden, until she tricks the empire’s “rules of reality” into accommodating her “imaginative logic” as a truth (“On the virtues of analogy” 34).

Shifting to an imaginary logic of performance, Tefs argues, allows both the novel and its heroine to begin within an “explosive” and “dramatic moment,” which immediately “lifts the narrative” beyond a “realistic plane and into something closer to resembling the mythic—and the magic” (83). It cues readers to not only expect the



unexpected, but also plays with their desire for passion and freedom, what Sweatman calls “a simple attraction to ecstasy” (“On the virtues of analogy” 34). Both Alice and Blondie have been playing within this idea of suspended belief and ecstasy in the ellipses, from the beginning of the novel. Within this elevated plane, readers question accepted truths of the empire along with the McCormack women and become co-conspirators in the return of passion. Sweatman allows the reader to feel the urgency to be re-born, just as does Blondie. Together, they stretch truths into fiction, fiction into performance, and performance into new truths.

New truths displace the ordinary, as Blondie’s return is a phenomenon that is larger than life. Her beginnings within Alice’s orgasm, in which a bolt of lightning electrifies the atomic make-up of her embryo, and then its transformation into a nuclear bomb by Dianna’s performative seems, to use Markotic’s term, “*farfetched*” (156). But remember Sweatman’s words: in a performance “the game’s rules are domesticated to the extent that it must, however wildly, appear plausible” (“On the virtues of analogy” 34). Acting out from an orgasm and an atom, while wrenching point (Tefs 83), is seductive in that it inspires a performance that is simultaneously outside and inside the body. As Tefs points out, Blondie presents as an icon more than an individual personality, but by the middle of the novel, her essence transforms into the individual performatives of her descendants. As a mentor of womanhood, Alice’s story transforms into Blondie’s and Blondie’s into Helen’s and Helen’s into Dianna’s “as if Blondie were there, inside them, witnessing the events over their shoulders, sharing their inner torments and responses” (83). Arguably as the novel progresses, Blondie’s essence becomes increasingly transitive, light, and full of grace, like Bill’s, but by Dianna’s performative, it also becomes more “potent,” “bold,” and “reproductive” than even Blondie could have imagined (440). Sweatman’s world of largess and hope is additive, accommodating Blondie, as both a mentor of womanhood and the spark of individuality. Blondie says early in the novel that it was not until Dianna’s performative that she realized how “small” and “uniform” her “world of hope” and “largesse” had become (28), but really she means the opposite.

As Blondie’s empire unfolds, Sweatman, as a shameless voyeur, plagiarist, and war artist, continues to play with the empire’s adventure story. She sifts through its ruins,

not only mimicking its creative process, the text, but also usurping the empire's ruins and transforming them into her world of performance, as a backdrop to Blondie's story. Rather than pulling performance back from ecstasy and reiterating the ordinary, Sweatman mentors her own advice, strikes the match, and sets the dead stick of an old story on fire in pursuit of passion and freedom. Alice mentors this performance strategy within a protected time and space in her histrionic theater and school, and later her descendants practice it within their own adventure stories. Sweatman suggests that transforming ruins into origins, endings into beginnings, is a performance strategy that can be taught, learned, and mentored.

Sweatman's world, as performance, turns on both simple and complex acts. For example, a single repeating act such a sneeze, kiss, stare, laugh, smile, or glance foreshadows a change in script, while more complex acting, combining histrionics, hyperbole, transvestism, and feigned diminution teaches the reader to "empathize with the experience of the performers playing. This empathy with the performer rather than with the plot" permits the reader to "'wander,' to explore detours and hidden pathways, unexpected turns in performance" (Schechner, PT 356-357). But Sweatman teaches more than empathy: she teaches curiosity, creation, and liberation. She seduces her readers into not only wanting to "'see what happens next'" or "'experience how the performer performs whatever is happening'" (PT 357), but also how to feel that performance of passion 'as' their own. As this co-performance between writer-performer-reader expands the text in the ellipses, each woman is at the same time creating her own space that allows for "further play — improvisation, variation, and enjoyment" (PT 356). Sweatman transforms the Empire's gender performative into play, and recasts and transforms this play, using Butler's terminology, into "a specific modality of power as discourse" (BTM 187).

Sweatman suggests that these ellipses are between the living and the dead, somewhere 'out there,' but yet the McCormack women's gender play and transformations happen right in front of the reader on the empire's adventure playground within Blondie's garden near St. Norbert, Manitoba. Sweatman, ever the jokester, tricks her readers into thinking that they are examining and transforming the gender performative into play from a critical distance within the protected space of her adventure

playground. The reader plays alongside the McCormack women, as voyeurs, plagiarists, and war artists, reducing seemingly impenetrable complex social and cultural issues of dominant discourse to their simplest form and examining them. For example, the empire's discourse is reduced to Richard, an impotent coward, a mere gesture of the empire. Richard, to use Wyile's imagery, is looking rather ghostly by the end of the novel. Throughout the novel, Sweatman is obsessed with reducing complex discourses to their simplest form not only to make the performance as clear as possible for the reader, but also to mentor gender play as a performance strategy.

While Sweatman is having fun playing with the empire's adventure story, Blondie's adventure turns on an orgasm and an atom, which are recognizable truths in both the empire's adventure story and Blondie's story. Although Dianna reconfigures an atom of anarchy into an erotic and political orgasm from the same nucleus that the empire has reconfigured into war, Dianna's reassembling of Blondie's essence into words on a page is socially and politically responsible. It is a space without fear, hatred, rage, and lust; it is a space of compassion, passion, love, kindness, honesty, and generosity. It is a cadre of peace: "Not the self as personal ego, but . . . the self that is identical to the universal absolute" (Schechner, PT 357). Within this space, the sexed body and the sensual body slide easily into one, as if they have always been one. The body becomes its own citation and announces itself as a "sexy" and "provocative" sidewinder (2). Tefs argues, "we learn" of the McCormack women's "inner crises, their desires, their fears, their weaknesses, not through slow openings in personality . . . they are simply announced to us" (83). Some observant readers realize that Blondie has announced her return as passion already in the prologue of the novel, and it reminds them of what they already know, but may have forgotten, that they, too, are a 'Blondie,' while others may not realize passion's return until Dianna's explosive and political performative. Still others, like Markotic, are left wondering why Sweatman did not develop her characters.

Sweatman thinks as Schechner does that both distance and introspection are necessary to play in a world, as performance. The sidewinder, like the theater, is a "place of/for seeing" and this "Seeing requires distance; engenders focus or differentiation; encourages analysis or breaking apart into logical strings; privileges meaning, theme, narration" (PT 333). For example, Sweatman extrapolates the ability to think and doubt

from Descartes' theory of radical doubt, and then uses it to reduce his mind/body dualism to a laughable assumption. But at the same time, the sidewinder is a bodily discourse, "the where of intimacy, sharing bodily substances, mixing the inside and the outside, emotional experiences, and gut feelings" (PT 333-334). Overlaying Marie's grotto, the body becomes a map of invisible trails that lead to and from ecstasy. It reclaims itself as an additive and expanding space of creativity and liberation, where "odd arrangements and funny solutions will be re-invented" (Sweatman, "The future of Prairie Lit" D13).

Returning to the opening page of the novel, Sweatman has deliberately left an ellipsis, separating the first two passages of Isaiah from the third, to accommodate these "odd arrangements" and "funny solutions." Previously, the empire's warring narrative had occupied this space, as Phillips has argued, but by the prologue Blondie's body, as discourse, overrides the Empire's discursive authority. Although Markotic argues that Sweatman's characters are "mere backdrop for the last century or so of 'Current Events' that take precedence over their stories"(156), Sweatman had already transformed the ruins of the empire's adventure story into the backdrop of her adventure into passion and introduced Blondie in the prefatory pages of the novel. Theology, mythology, science, and history, which had previously ensured Blondie's erasure, now enable her return. Markotic says that she had hoped to read Blondie's story, but instead was bombarded with a predictable and stereotypical "political summary" that makes "the last century seem quite banal" (157). She appears to be mimicking Dianna's daughter Helen's behaviour at the end of Dianna's performance. Neither Markotic nor Helen see Blondie's body 'as' and 'in' a world of performance beyond gender, even though Blondie is right there in front of them. The only difference between them is that Helen was born with her eyes wide open.

Sweatman's textual transformation into performance pushes lost passion into action, but she is not just encouraging her readers to 'fall.' She is also challenging the post-structural, cultural, and feminist theorists to follow suit. Switching from surface politics to identity politics is often dangerous with tensions erupting particular to race, sex, gender, class, and religion. Implicated in this gendered politics, but no longer defined by it, Sweatman challenges her reader, critic, and theorist to think and imagine the core of selfhood without this gendered noise, and to remember, instead, the laughter

and celebration surrounding Blondie's birth. After all, one commonality shared by all women is that their passion has been banished. Sweatman argues that its return can transform not only the core of selfhood and womanhood, but also the core of feminist study.

For Sweatman, being implicated in the empire's regulatory network and being a captive of it are two different things. Implication, thanks to the theologized, mythologized, and historicized Adam and Eve story and Isaiah's misinterpreted words, enables both a critical examination and a possibility of change, whereas captivity means Isaiah's utopian idea of intimacy, colonial, and gender blindness. Turning the empire's discourse back on itself in a counter-clockwise discourse of womanhood, Sweatman identifies a reiterating gap, a moment of passion and a space of creative freedom within the female body, which has always been there and through which a woman's banished passion can gain entry back into the adventure story, repeatedly. Although this space and bodily discourse has been sanctioned within the empire's adventure story by Richard and Thomas Scott's ghost, in the House of God by Alice and Peter, on the landscape by Blondie, and on the white page and world stage by Dianna, Sweatman's 'fall' does not displace one regulatory system with another.

Granted, the McCormack women are white women, but they are not mentoring just white ways. Sweatman may have intended to create an even playing field, resembling the space of humanity John Anderson and Blondie shared in his kitchen, the space of compassion that Blondie shared with the dead spirits of soldiers in the graveyard or the community of generosity Dianna created on her island, which, as Schechner says performance allows. But in the end, Sweatman gets a bit petulant, and refuses to banish performance and passion back to the fringes of the adventure story or to the land of the dead. She will not settle for "small, barely noticeable climaxes" ("The future of Prairie Lit" D 13), a reoccurring nightmare of *Richard's*. Instead, Sweatman ends her novel, unapologetically, as it begins, simultaneously announcing the return of womanhood and the birth of the individual *within* and *as* an "explosive" and "dramatic moment" of ecstasy (Tefs 83). If Richard wants back into the adventure story, he will have to perform ecstasy in the bedroom, on the battlefield, and in the canon. Until then, Sweatman will continue to accommodate the ruins of his story as backdrop to her expanding adventure

story that begins again, with Alice's artistic 'eye,' the "bohunk" woman's intuitive humor, the Cree woman's diffident glance, Marie's teachings on solitude, Blondie's genius, Helen's parodic 'I,' and Dianna's scientific, artistic, and dramatic body as both a discourse and a political force.

Sweatman's picture of the performing sexy body generates at once a fear of and hope for her world of largesse. By destabilizing the empire's heterosexual imperative as a "reliable signifier of 'sex' or 'sex differences,'" which according to social-scientist Myra Hird in *Sex, Gender and Science* is already being realized since "up to 30 percent of the world's female population [do] not sexually reproduce" (88), Sweatman at once short-circuits the empire's heterosexual imperative and its gender binary. Rather than gender differentiation, Sweatman is moving her readers toward a world of sexual diversity that is not based on biological difference, but rather on an ability of the 'I' to perform itself into being. She embraces play-acting as integral to the self. Arguably, gender also represents the core of feminist study, and some theorists fear that playing in a world beyond gender will push forty years of feminist theory into redundancy. While Butler questions the legitimacy of gender, she still maintains her earlier appraisal that instead of moving beyond gender, new gender configurations, new gender "possibilities" need to be devised (GT xx). Butler's world continues to spin in textuality, as she inadvertently reiterates the empire's regulatory process.

Other theorists, such as Susan Gubar, think as Sweatman does that the gender performative is the core of the empire's adventure story, and refuse to reiterate it except in jest. Instead, they envision a world beyond gender, in which ellipses of passion and freedom will reconfigure into a multitude of scripts, enabling the performing 'I' to sidewind its way through the disciplines of law, science, politics, art, and drama, multiplying exponentially into a formidable political force. For example, Sweatman does not reject science as a masculine force, but joins it with its performative counterpart the imagination, enabling a paradigm shift from 'what if,' to 'as if,' to 'as,' and then mentors this creative process as a way of knowing and becoming. Separating gender from the sexed body does not mean an end, as Butler fears, but rather, as Alice says, quitting leaves space for new beginnings (246). Gender study has provided the platform, but now perhaps it is time to leave the word, gender, in the ruins of an old story and old war, and

celebrate what Sweatman deems possible: a performing, sexy female body as its own Big Bang, the product of an orgasm and an atom, manifesting its individuality as simultaneously a shameless voyeur and plagiarist, a jokester, a 'well-hung' male, and a war artist . . .

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